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ISSUE 112
FEBRUARY 2003

WIN THE GAMES CONSOLE OF YOUR CHOICE! PAGE 90

BMX XXX EXPOSED! Over 100 uncensored pics!

HYPER

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THE 25 BEST GAMES OF 2003

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FREELANCER

METROID PRIME

GUILTY GEAR XX

next

HOT HARDWARE

No more squinty eyes!

PLAY GBA GAMES ON YOUR TV

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Unreal Championship & MechAssault lead the way

12
9 771320 745018

REVIEWS: APE ESCAPE 2 • SLY RACCOON • THE GETAWAY • WRC2 EXTREME

unleash your inner demon
march 2003
PlayStation 2
PAL
DEVIL MAY CRY 2
MA15+
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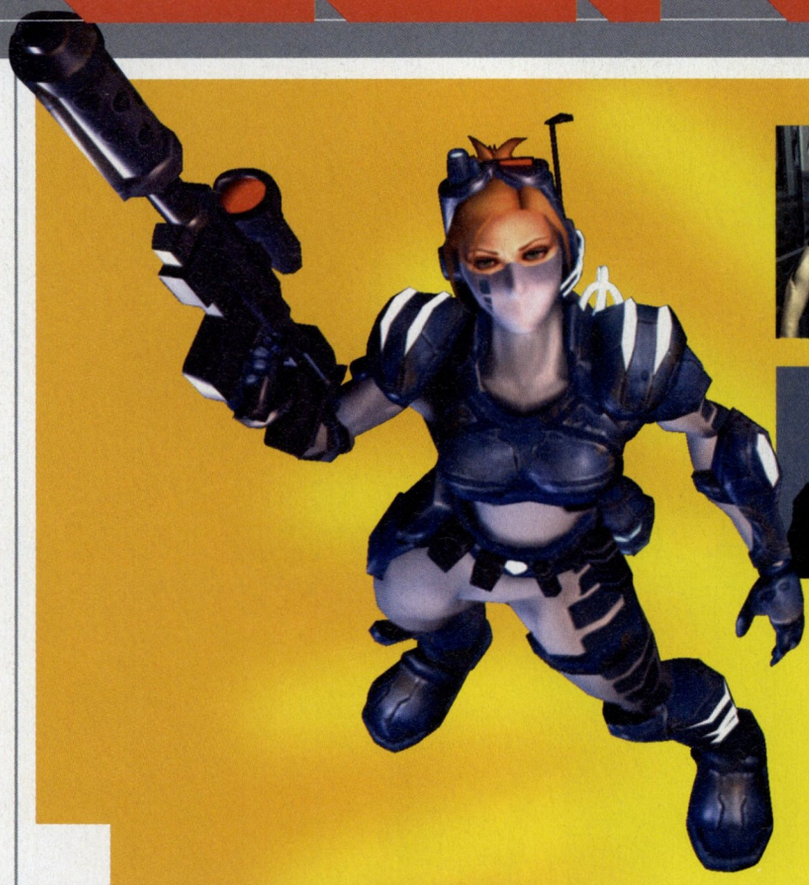

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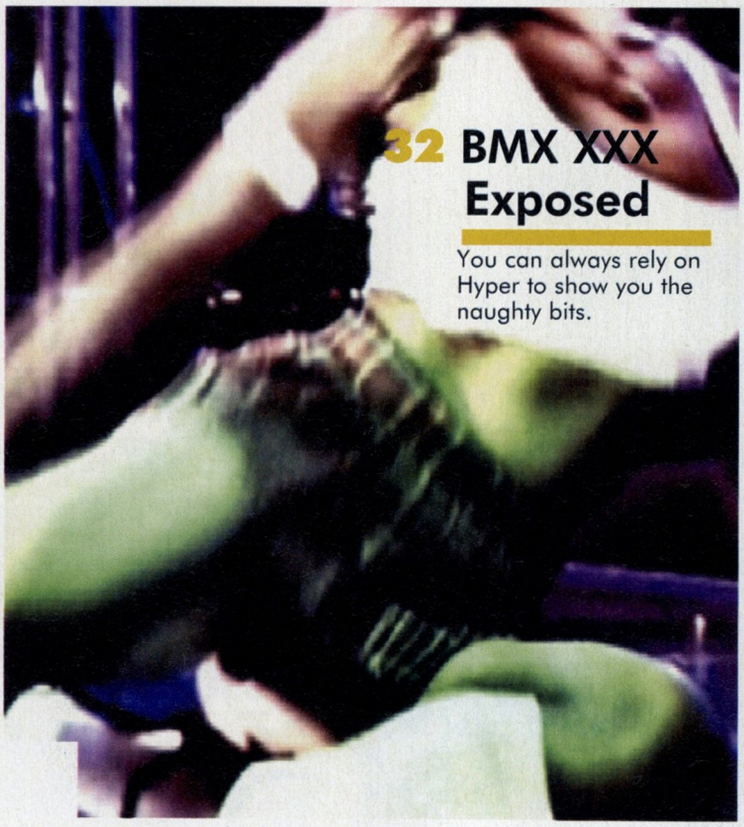
The Hyper crew have handpicked the 25 most exciting games of 2003. Whoo hoo!



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Phew, it's the mother of all review issues... 42 pages of them in fact!

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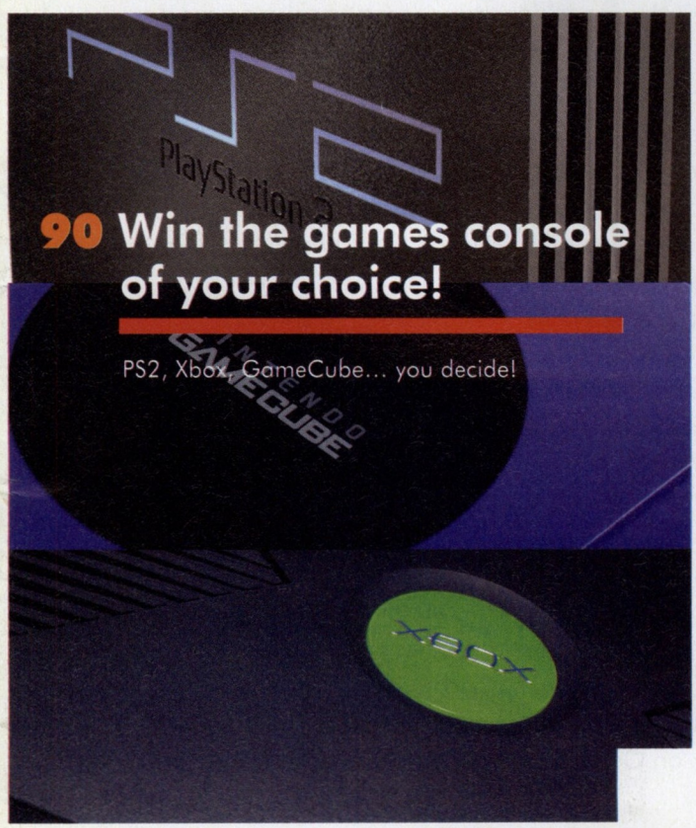

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HYPER»

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EDITORIAL

» 2003 – I thought we'd never make it. We've survived an Uruk-Hai invasion in *The Two Towers*, brain-numbing games such as Universal Studios Theme Park on GameCube, 12 months of lukewarm Redfern lunchtime cuisine, office soccer injuries that threatened to end our gaming careers, hilarious Friday updates on Hyperactive (thanks Jackson), ridiculous gaming industry parties involving barechested men in wigs and horny helmets, excruciating deadlines that almost snuffed out my screenshot captioning ability, very loud and relentless skateboard trickery from Steve and Cam, bewitching visits from the angelic Anika, bizarre offers of money from Nigeria, endless stunning victories and defeats in our daily bouts of PES2, Malcolm's deadly ping-pong ball tricks, the delights of a brand new Hyperactive forum launch, a Spinal Tap performance from Billy Idol at Stadium Australia, weeks of waiting patiently by the courier desk for our copies of Vice City and Metroid Prime, cries of pain from the nether regions of the office where those other strange magazines do their work when we play Wesley Willis, strange Big Heavy Stuff groupies turning up at reception... okay, maybe I'm getting a little carried away now. Basically, 2002 was everything we had hoped it would be (bar Universal Studios Theme Park on GameCube). Bring on the new year!

Eliot Fish » Editor

Hot Hand Helds on GAME BOY® ADVANCE™

The most popular and exciting driver on the world rallying stage today arrives on GBA and brings with him his all-out attacking style that has earned him the nickname The Flying Scotsman.

Rating G

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Lara is back and smaller than ever. Guide her through a series of turbulent exploits across the globe.

Rating M15+

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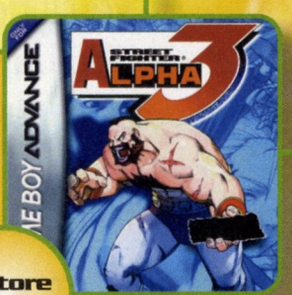

Showcase the martial arts prowess of 33 characters and participate in multiple levels of play.

Rating M15+

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NEWS

IN THE NEWS: GBA Player ■ Enix & Square merger ■ EA drop GCN prices

LET THERE BE LIGHT

GAME BOY PLAYA

Begone small dark screen!

Nintendo have unveiled a surefire hardware solution to fix the GBA's visibility problems for good. No, it's not GBA Mk II, but the "Game Boy Player" a new peripheral that does for the GameCube what the Super Game Boy did for the SNES.

SNUGGLING PERFECTLY

In other words, this device allows you to play Game Boy, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance games on your TV. It's a funky little piece of design, measuring barely an inch high and snuggling perfectly under your Cube. The Player plugs in via one of the GameCube's expansion slots and games are inserted via a cartridge slot at the front. From there you simply pop the boot disc into your GameCube and you're ready to go. Also cool is that you'll have a choice between using a GameCube controller or your GBA for control. Similar to the old Super Game Boy, the Game Boy Player will allow you to put funky borders around the edge of the screen to customise your GBA playing environment, or even better, you can dump the borders altogether.

>> Also cool is that you'll have a choice between using a GameCube controller or your GBA for control

Less exciting is the news that the system will have a timer that parents can activate that turns the machine off after a certain length of play. Good work Nintendo, way to prove your machines aren't just for kids! The bottom line, however, is that we'll finally be able to fully experience GBA games in all their glory. Visibility here we come!

The Game Boy Player will be available in Japan in March, the USA in May and Australia... some time in 2003. The wait is painful. However, if you're absolutely desperate, we'd venture a guess that an import unit should work fine, given the lack of regional lock-out on GBA hardware and software. We'll let you know as soon as we've tested the theory.

RPG SUPERCOMPANY

MERGER MADNESS

Square and Enix get busy

In a thoroughly unexpected announcement, two of Japan's most respected RPG powerhouses, Square and Enix, have agreed on plans to merge. From the 1st of April 2003 they will become Square Enix. This is a move designed to consolidate the interests of the two companies and provide greater security in an industry with ever-increasing development costs and foreign competition. It may also be a move by Square to symbolically thumb their nose at Microsoft and their previous attempts to buy the company. Have at you evil American overlord!

Whether the merger has any real effect on the day to day development of games by the two companies is unlikely. Enix's Star Ocean 3 and Square's Final Fantasy X-2 are both on the way so we'll know before too long. This also opens the door for potential Capcom Vs SNK style cross-over titles, although initial reports indicate that the company does not plan to unite the Final Fantasy games with the Dragon Quest series. Probably a wise move. Even so, we could yet see Bust A Groove 3 starring Squall... or not.

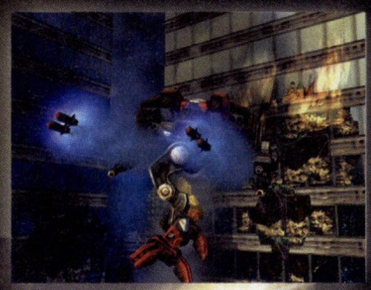
CAPTION THIS!

Hey there faithful readers – think you have the wit to make the Hyper team chuckle? Then think of your best caption for this screenshot and email it to Captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 38 in the Subject line.

Ho ho ha ha he he hi hi hu hu

MECHASSAULT

ONLY ON XBOX



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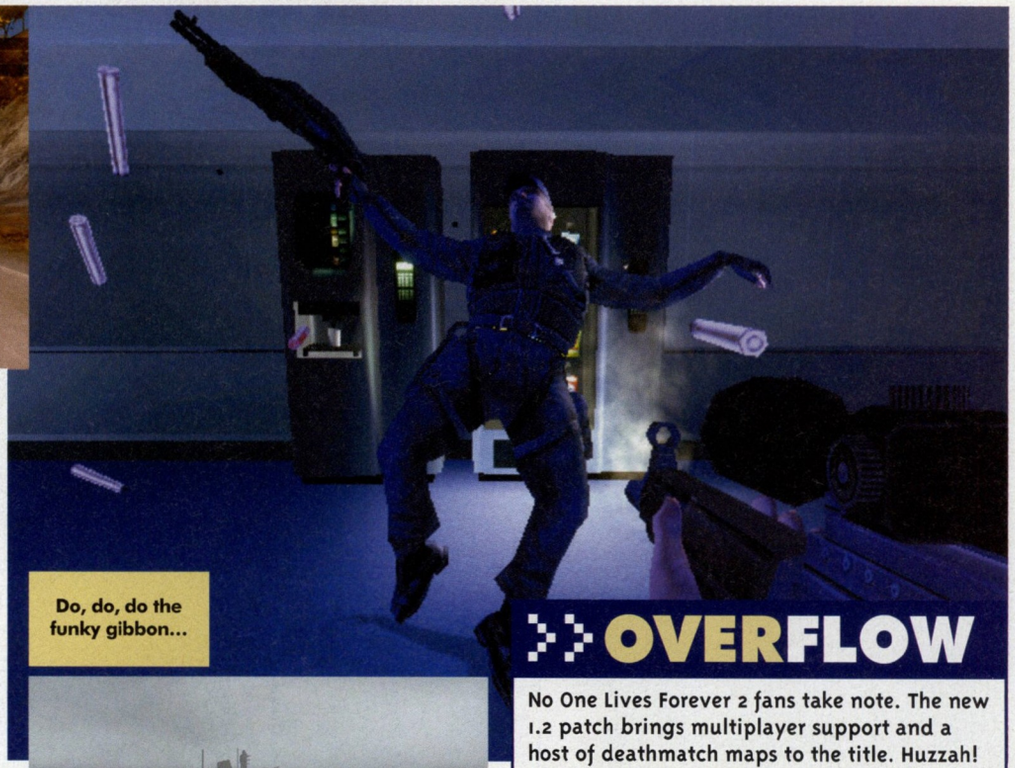


Do, do, do the funky gibbon...

CHEAP GAMES!

HAVE AT YOU GAME PRICES

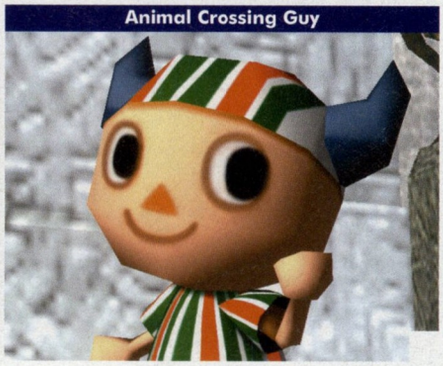
EA drop GCN software prices

Electronic Arts recently announced a sweeping range of price cuts across all their GameCube software titles. The drop has already taken effect, resulting in prices from $39.95 up. This includes huge games like 007: Nightfire, MOH: Frontline, NFS: Hot Pursuit 2 and FIFA 2003... although it's obviously a sliding scale, with Harry Potter being the only title not to be reduced at all. The reasoning behind the price drop is to give the GameCube a boost in this country. Obviously sales haven't been up to EA's expectations, and in light of "Nintendo's disappointing reluctance to compete with Microsoft and Sony, Electronic Arts are leading the way in helping to ensure that hit Gamecube titles are accessible and affordable to the general public". Let's hope Nintendo take comments like these to heart and give their marketing approach a bit of an inspection. Oh, and a GameCube price drop certainly wouldn't hurt!

ICO

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

Animal Crossing Guy



OLD SKOOL

VIRTUA NOSTALGIA

Classic SEGA titles resurrected

Sega recently revealed that a slew of their classic titles will be getting the update treatment by the recently established 3D-Ages. The list includes: Golden Axe, Space Harrier, Phantasy Star I, II and IV, Fantasy Zone, Alex Kidd in Miracle World, Virtua Racing, Streets of Rage, Bonanza Brothers, Monaco GP and Last Bronx. The good news is that these won't just be ports (unlike the classic Sega titles coming to Xbox) – they'll be remakes. Thus, Space Harrier and Fantasy Zone will be in full 3D, while Phantasy Star will have improved graphics and 3D dungeons. We're somewhat skeptical as to the value of these re-releases, but Sega seem intent on ramming their old games repeatedly down our throats, so we'll just have to wait and see.

OVERFLOW

No One Lives Forever 2 fans take note. The new 1.2 patch brings multiplayer support and a host of deathmatch maps to the title. Huzzah!

The new Game Boy Advance Pokémon titles, Ruby and Sapphire, will be out on March 17 in the USA, with an Australian release to (hopefully) follow shortly after. They're already off to a flying start in Japan, with sales of over 672 and 700 thousand units respectively in their first week alone. Looks like the Pokémon phenomenon isn't dead after all.

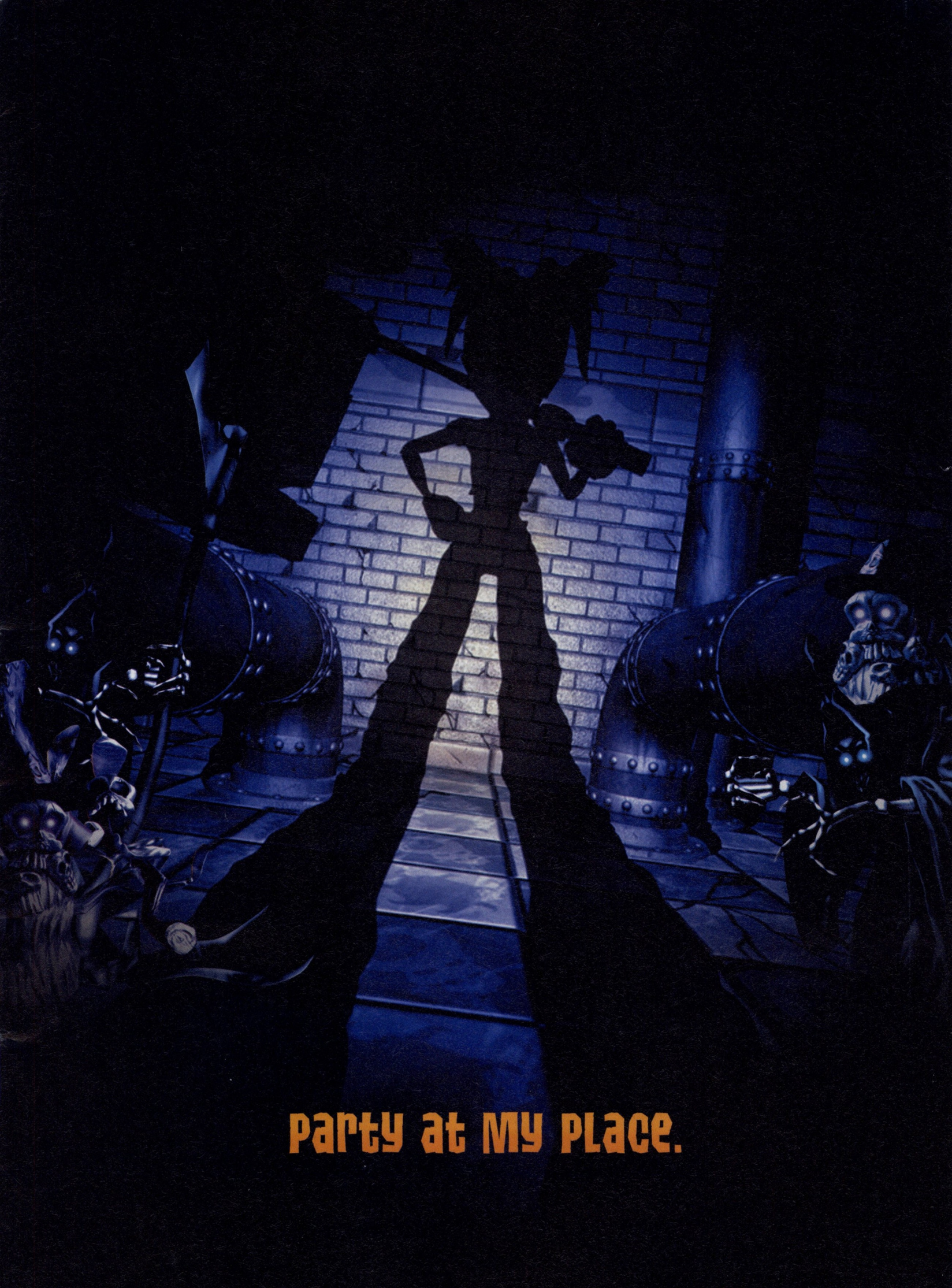
Sega's Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution is heading from the arcades to PlayStation 2. What's new in it? You'll have two new characters to choose from – Thai kickboxer Brad Burns and Judo master Gou Himori, a couple of new stages, new techniques, items and even a new Original Quest mode. We're also pleased to report that VF4:E will support progressive scan, so we can kiss goodbye to the horrible flicker that dragged down the visuals of the original PS2 version. Hopefully other elements of the visuals will be cleaned up too.

Square recently revealed that Final Fantasy Tactics Advance for the GBA will feature around 300 missions with over 40 available character classes. It's out mid-February in Japan... bring on the English version!

Apparently film star Vin Diesel was so disappointed with the games based on xXx that he's decided to start up his own development house. It will be called Tigon and his first project is set in the 70s and centers around a corrupt and brutal cop. Let's hope he understands the importance of crates.

Word has it that Shiny's long awaited title "Enter the Matrix" will be out on May 15th 2003 in the States. Hopefully, we'll get it soon after. Cooler still is that the story has apparently been crafted by the Wachowski brothers themselves, and the major actors from the films have lent their vocal talents to the project!

Jet Set Radio is coming to the Game Boy Advance – hoo-haa!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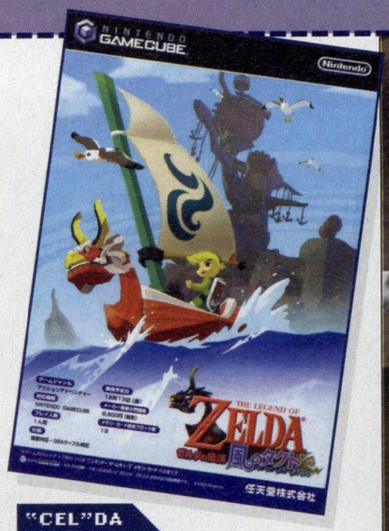

"CEL"DA

BUNDLE OF JOY

Zelda pre-order goodness

Gamers in Japan who pre-ordered Zelda: The Wind Waker (yes, that is its official Western title) were rewarded with updated GameCube renditions of Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and Ura Zelda (the 64DD expansion). The good news is that this deal has just been confirmed for the US as well (the game comes out on March 24th), which means that it's very likely to happen out here too. Rejoice! At this stage we're not exactly sure how enhanced these games are, but for Zelda fans getting the previously unreleased Ura Zelda alone will be reward enough.

HOT!
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Hyper 110

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TY THE TASMANIAN TIGER
Cathy Staines, QLD
Oliver Summarsell, SA
Rose McCoubrie, WA
Daniel Gabrysiak, NSW
James Reyes, NSW

CONVERSE (PART 2)
Marco Brunato, NSW

Hyperactive

SPIDER-MAN DVD:
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MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER

»XBOX/PC

BLACK LABEL GAMES

Developed by Warthog Entertainment, Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter has been likened to a cross between Serious Sam and Elite – a bizarre mixture if ever there was one – and we like it! The game mixes space combat with first-person shooter action, with a story involving space pirates, super alien cattle and crime lords. Out soon!

TYRANNOSAURUS REX
North America
Late Cretaceous

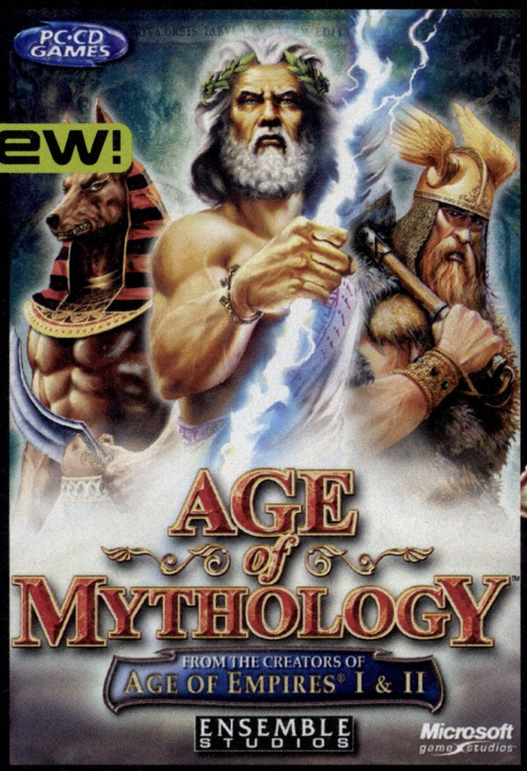
JURASSIC PARK

»PC/XBOX/PS2

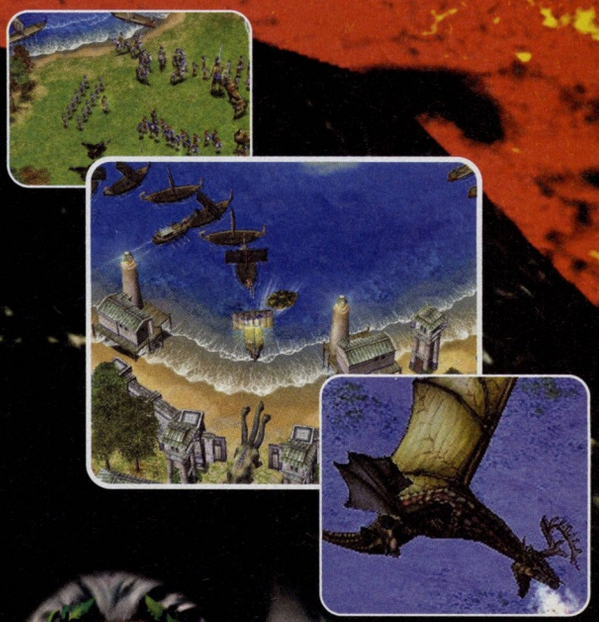
UNIVERSAL INTERACTIVE

This one's an Aussie project, mate. Blue Tongue Software in Melbourne have been developing this "dinosaur theme park" world-building title for Universal, and it looks like they've hit upon a seriously entertaining mixture of sim, action and humour. They've even got the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra to perform the score. It should be coming out early this year, but for now we'll just ogle the pretty dinosaurs.

GAMES CENTRAL



NEW!



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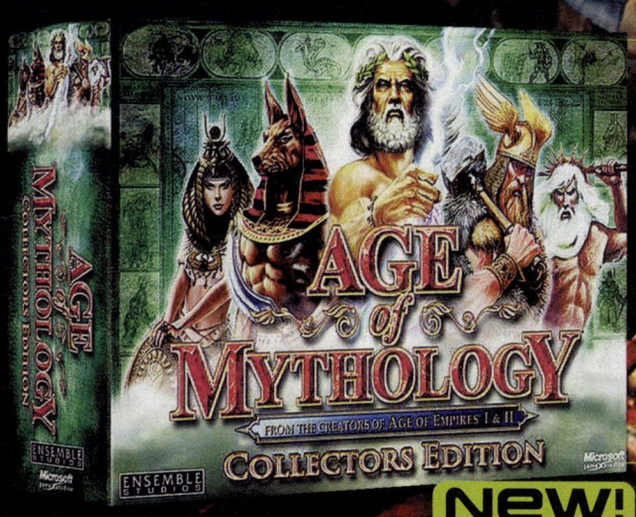

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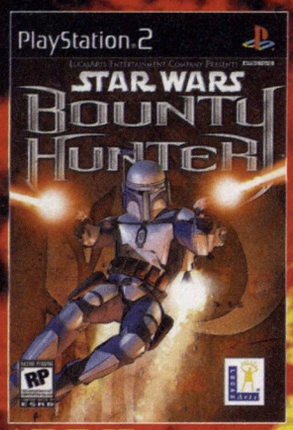

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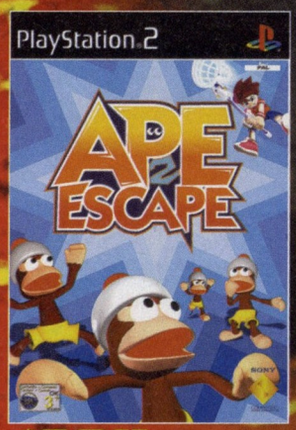

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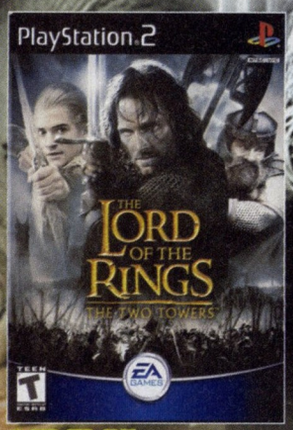

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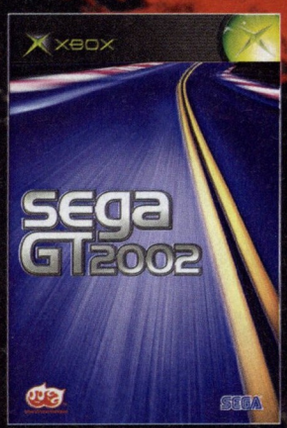

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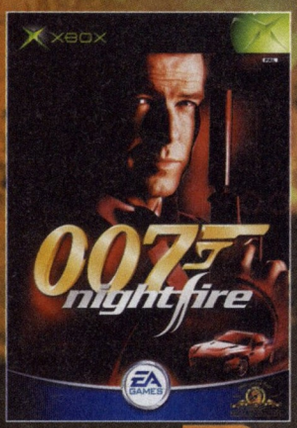

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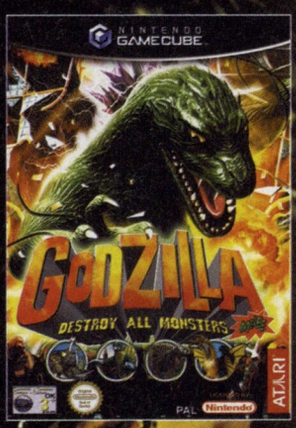

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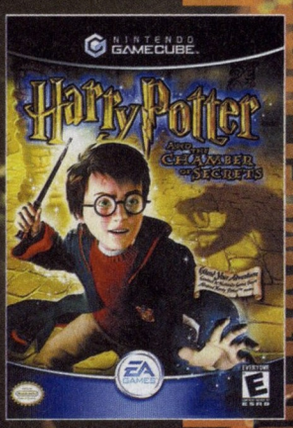
Godzilla Destroy All Monsters Melee GC (G8+) 11102



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2003: 25 GAMES TO REALLY GET EXCITED ABOUT

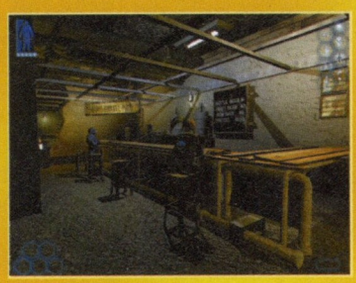
Here we are at the beginning of a fresh gaming year. Yet another 12 months of obsession, addiction, rapture, enlightenment and painful disappointment promises to consume us. Half of the fun, as far as we're concerned, is the nervous wait – the glorious anticipation of a game's release. Checking websites daily, reading all you can on a particular title no matter how trivial the details, hoarding screenshots, and going to sleep at night dreaming of finally getting your hands on it. Then comes the day when it arrives and you get to tear away the shrink-wrap, smell the packaging and reveal your brand new best friend.

There are games that appeal to us for quirky personal reasons (Mojibribon), and some that we know will be too brilliant to ignore (DX2). With a whole new gaming year ahead of us, we thought we'd highlight 25 games that we're already getting anxious about and we recommend you do too. These are games that promise to deliver something special.

We're not going to include obvious games here – we all know Soul Calibur 2 will be just as brilliant as the original, but from playing it at the arcades we know that it's essentially more of the same. We also know that Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance for Xbox will be worth buying the moment it graces shelves, but again, it will be more of the same tried and true gameplay. You won't find those titles in this feature. Nor will you find Command & Conquer: Generals, Zone of the Enders 2 or Black and White 2 – all games that we're sure will continue to offer quality gameplay, but that didn't quite fit the criteria we had for this feature.

We wanted to include some of the games coming out this year that have that spark of something truly special. We wanted to highlight 25 games that promise to deliver something unique, revolutionary or offer gameplay that appears to take a few chances. So here we have it – 25 games to REALLY get excited about in 2003...

[Right] Two gas-mask wearing freaks.
[Below] See the woman with the gun behind her back? Interesting NPCs...



DX2: Invisible War

PC/Xbox/PS2

Developer: Ion Storm Austin

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: The first Deus Ex changed our perceptions of the First Person Shooter, blending RPG elements with stealth and complex action. The development team at Ion Storm Austin is still headed by Warren Spector, and boasts enough talent to virtually guarantee that they'll create a sequel good enough to blow us away all over again, despite our high expectations.

FEATURES: Approximately 20 years after the events that unfolded in Deus Ex, the world is struggling to rebuild itself after a long, dark depression. It's not known how Ion Storm Austin will explain the three potential endings of the original game, but we've been promised they've come up with a "cool" solution. In any case, the world of DX2 looks dirty, run-down and almost Fallout-esque.

DX2 will allow the player to play as either a male or female agent named Alex Denton. Apparently, the team had a funny idea for the beginning of the game that would solve the trivial dilemma of choosing your agent's sex. The player is faced with needing to choose between a male or female toilet at the training facility, and depending on which one you walk into, you'll be staring at your chosen sex in the bathroom mirror.

Featuring a diverse range of locations such as Seattle, Germany and Cairo, players will again be able to pursue non-violent solutions to the problems they are presented with, if desired. You will also interact with far more intelligent NPC characters with a wider range of emotions that can be affected by the player's actions. Again, the game will offer a branching plot that will change depending on the results of certain missions and the moral choices the player makes.

A big difference to the original Deus Ex, is the way player skills have been axed for the preference of a more complex augmentation system. In fact, augs are now called Biomods, and you'll be limited to a certain number of body slots, requiring you to carefully choose how you enhance yourself depending on your preferred playing style. Illegal Biomods can even be bought on the black market, allowing the player to seriously screw with their own body in order to gain some exceptionally powerful abilities, but as you imagine these will be hard to find.

Ion Storm Austin are determined this time around to also have the graphics to match the gameplay, and DX2 will use the Unreal Warfare engine to stunning effect. Real-time lighting will play a greater role in gameplay, as will the improved environmental sound and the necessity for the player to be more observant than ever. DX2: Invisible War is easily the most promising PC game of 2003, and Doom III can't hope to touch this one with a ten-foot BFG.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Like GTA: Vice City, it would be hard for DX2 to not at least deliver as much thrill as the first game. But will the new gameplay changes, and the desire to offer the player even more choice, offer as finely balanced a game as Deus Ex did? As long as they test the hell out of it...

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker

GameCube

Developer: Nintendo EAD

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's a Shigeru Miyamoto game, and he always strives to offer the player new experiences – just take a look at Pikmin. Add to that the fact that EAD have been able to draw on the substantial Legend of Zelda universe and game mechanics, and you have a recipe for a truly memorable game.

FEATURES: The controversial switch to a younger cel-shaded style disappointed many fanboys who were drooling over the early Link GameCube tech demos, but as far as we were concerned it was an inspired change. The drive for more realism in game graphics just never suited the Zelda formula which is all about fantasy, puzzles and bizarre characters. A cartoon approach does suit this style of game, and allows for far more colour, exaggerated personalities and allows the development team to be less concerned with adhering to a "believable" environment.

Cel-shaded Link now has a clear selection of facial expressions that add humour and also help guide the player through certain situations in the game. Link's eyes are extremely expressive, and will track items and characters in the environment. The simplistic style also reinforces the fact that Link himself is younger in this game (the game starts during his 12th birthday), and the story is set prior to any of the other Legend of Zelda games. We get to find out how it all began.

At the beginning of the adventure, Link's sister is captured by a giant bird, and Link must set off across the sea in his talking boat (which aids him in his travels much like Epona the horse) to rescue her from the "island of the magical beast". The game is now broken up into islands that Link must travel between, as opposed to a large land area. Sailing around requires Link to learn how to control the wind – an element that becomes a big part of the gameplay. With the Wind Wand, which can be controlled with the analogue sticks, expect a whole new set of puzzles fresh to the Zelda universe.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: If there's a tendency to repeat old Zelda formula too often in the puzzle design, this prequel could retread all-too familiar territory and fail to surprise and delight as we expect it to. However, the element of wind should mean there's plenty of new puzzles here to stump Zelda veterans.

[Above] **See the emotion on Link's face? It's all in-game and will help give the gameplay a whole new twist.**

[Above] **Master Chief is now bathed in all new lighting effects, making him look all the more solid and tangible.**

Halo 2

Xbox

Developer: Bungie

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: Are you kidding? Halo is the Xbox's flagship title, and Bungie will have been given everything they need to make sure Halo 2 is even more incredible. With a Microsoft budget at their disposal, just imagine what they'll be able to pull out of the hat a second time around with the hardware.

FEATURES: At this stage, not a lot is known about Halo 2 other than the fact that Master Chief is sent down to the surface of planet Earth to save humankind from the Covenant. But hey, that's rather important stuff! Bungie promise that Halo 2 will be everything we loved about Halo but "with the knobs turned up to 11". To prove their point, they are building Halo 2 up from scratch with a brand new re-worked 3D engine.

The most obvious improvement to the game at first glance is the texturing and lighting. After tinkering with the Xbox for a few years, Bungie now know how to squeeze even more power and special visual candy out of the hardware, and as a result the Halo world and Master Chief now look even more dramatic. The game also promises to have double the number of vehicles to play with, more weapons, more enemies, and most importantly, online Xbox Live play. The potential here for online Halo clans and a player ranking system makes the wait for Halo 2 that much harder. In fact, online Halo 2 play sounds very much like the original Halo concept of open warfare between two well-populated sides. Joy!

As far as the single-player goes, you can expect a more in-depth experience. The AI in Halo was great, but the AI in Halo 2 promises to be even better. Enemies will have far more options open to them than just shooting or avoiding combat. Now they might even create their own cover by knocking over an object, or move to a more advantageous position – like a walkway above the player – in an effort to take you out. You can also expect a few new surprises from Master Chief's brand new armoured suit.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Bungie really need to work on the interactivity in the environments, as most of Halo's environments looked great but felt lifeless. More interesting mission objectives, more depth to the story and less repetition is needed to make Halo 2 truly stand head and shoulders above its predecessor. We think they can do it.

Fable Xbox

Developer: Big Blue Box

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: Any game that promises a free-roaming non-linear experience excites us. The Xbox hardware can also pull off incredibly large game worlds, which is perfect for such a fantasy adventure that allows the player so much freedom to explore.

FEATURES: Now this is what we call role-playing. In Fable (the game formerly known as Project Ego), the way you play will determine your destiny. You forge your own character and personality based upon your actions within the game world.

In a tale of life-long revenge, you traverse the land looking to serve vengeance upon the killers of your family, doing the odd adventurer's job along the way. You can be a do-gooder, an evil thief, a rogue, a lazy bum, or a zealot – your decisions will affect how other characters perceive you and what kind of opportunities come your way.

If you pursue heroic activities, children in villages may look upon you as a personal hero and copy your hairstyle. If you've been going around beating people up, you can expect to have mothers locking their children up in the house when you walk into town. The more you fight, the bigger your muscles will become and the more buff your character will look. Eat and rest too much and you'll get a gut. Spend more time adventuring at night and your skin will grow pale and you'll look somewhat creepy. As you play through your adventure, your character will even age, grow a beard or go bald. The scope is quite incredible. The potential freedom to do what you want and have it actually affect the way the game responds to you sets Fable up to be the role-playing dream game.

The level demoed for us included wind-swept wheat pastures, an abundance of flora and fauna and some truly detailed character animation. The man behind this concept is none other than respected games designer, Peter Molyneux, the creator of Black & White. Yet again, he's off trying to realise an ambitious game concept (that crazy guy!), but we think he may have outdone himself this time.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Many other games have promised big things and then failed to really deliver the promised goods. Can they develop a huge non-linear game world and not have the framerate grind to a halt? Will the role-playing and variety of player actions truly affect the gameplay or will the player's evolving appearance just turn out to be a visual novelty?

StarCraft: Ghost PS2/Xbox/GameCube

Developer: Blizzard/Nihilistic Software

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's StarCraft up close and personal! For fans of the series so far, there won't be anything much more exciting than going face-to-face with the Protoss or Zerg – and as a Ghost unit no less! Blizzard are aware of gamers' expectations for a new StarCraft game, so the pressure is on to not spoil the license. You can be guaranteed that the game will be of a certain quality.

FEATURES: Gameplay is a blend of third-person action and tactical play. Your character, Nova, can engage in hand-to-hand combat and yet also call down Battlecruiser and Siege Tank strikes. Nova will even have the opportunity to pilot the odd vehicle, and get to grips with a range of classic StarCraft weapons – the gauss rifle, Perdition flamethrower and more. As a Ghost unit, you'll also have the ability to cloak yourself, move at super sonic speed, immobilise electronic devices, and move acrobatically through the environment. In gameplay terms, you can think of Nova as almost like a cross between Lara Croft and Samus Aran. You'll be somersaulting over a gangplank, detecting a heat signal, and then nuking the crap out of your enemy before they even know you're there.

Fans will be pleased to know that a lot of the charming aspects of StarCraft have been retained for Ghost. Enemies will spout forth phrases familiar to gamers who played the hell of out StarCraft, and some of the environments are even loaded with references to the original game.

Blizzard aren't really developing this one internally, but instead overseeing the production and giving the day to day development to Nihilistic Software who brought us Vampire the Masquerade. We believe they're a talented bunch over there, so the pairing has the potential to be very successful. StarCraft: Ghost has been pencilled in for late 2003.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Third-person action games have been churned out at such a rate over the last few years, that we're getting a little tired of the formula. Stealth? Sniping? We've done it to death now. Blizzard and Nihilistic will have to work hard to come up with a fresh twist other than just the cool StarCraft stylings. Hopefully the strategy elements will spice it up.

[Above] **Luckily, Blizzard designed great StarCraft characters in the first place, so they look really cool up close!**

Metroid Prime GameCube

Developer: Retro Studios

[Right] The visor view looks cramped, but it works a treat. We especially like the odd reflection of Samus' face.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's the full-blown return of Metroid. Super Metroid on the SNES was one of the most enjoyable and creative videogames ever, and now it's a full-blooded GameCube revival.

FEATURES: Metroid Prime is all about the bizarre atmosphere of alien environments and your ability as the player to decipher a solution to the problems you are faced with in the game. Keen observation of each location is necessary to determine how to progress or foil your opponents. It's this brilliant combination of action, platforming and puzzle solving that has spawned legions of Metroid fans the world over.

Samus Aran's range of abilities – from the guidance of her power suit interface to her armour and armaments – allows the player to experiment and play within the sprawling levels until you adapt and learn the game's unique quirks and hidden secrets.

Samus can find upgrades for her armour such as the thermal visor (that lets you track heat signatures), x-ray visor (that allows you to peer through walls to find passages or objects), the spider-ball (a variation on the morph ball that allows you to travel along specific magnetic tracks), the grapple-beam (enabling you to latch onto specific energy nodes to reach hard to get to places) and much more. You can also gain different armoured suits to give you the ability to survive high temperatures or negate the effects of water.

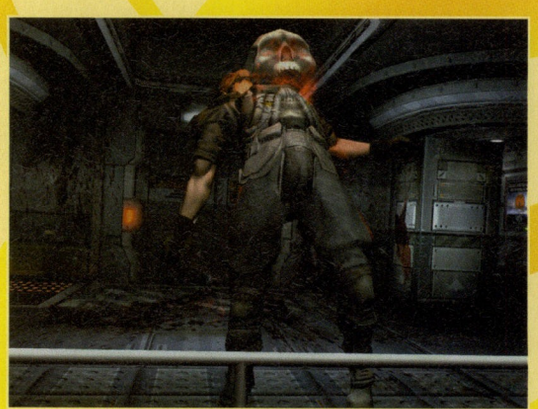
The game starts out above the planet Tallon IV, and the Space Pirates who somehow survived Super Metroid are conducting twisted experiments on indigenous life-forms. It's your job as Samus Aran to put a stop to them once and for all. As a bonus, Metroid Prime can link up with Metroid Fusion on the Game Boy Advance and you'll unlock different secrets depending on whether you've finished either game.

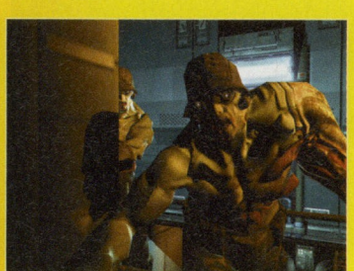
Metroid Prime is set to be one of the GameCube's must-have titles when it's released in Australia early this year.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Can the Metroid style of gameplay truly work in 3D? The whole charm of Metroid was the 2D map system and being able to see out-of-reach areas that seemed inaccessible. Metroid Prime may just suffer from the necessity to simplify this concept for a more easy-to-navigate 3D environment and first-person control set.

Doom III PC/Xbox

Developer: id Software





[Above] id Software just can't resist a few Wolfenstein references! Those Nazi-style helmets are the big giveaway.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: id Software always manage to come up with a new 3D engine worth drooling over. Plus, it will have all the cool Doom stuff. We hope.

FEATURES: It's been likened to a first-person survival horror game; a living nightmare for the solo gamer. What were once huge rooms full of imps and cyberdemons have become cramped, badly lit hallways where the fear isn't in the overwhelming odds but the tension of not knowing where or what your enemy is.

Whilst it's a big shift away from the dynamics of the earlier Doom games, we still believe that the eerie approach id Software are taking this time around can translate into a suitably terrifying and thrilling gaming experience. The realism has been pumped to the point where flesh looks truly soft and flabby and metallic surfaces glint and shimmer under the moody sci-fi lighting. It may not look like the Doom of old, but the creatures are still demonic, with gruesome teeth, bloodied claws and glowing eyes a-plenty. When you get attacked, your player even becomes disorientated, your vision blurs and your perspective warps. The main aim of Doom III seems to be all about scaring the crap out of the player.

Id Software are boasting a new physics engine that surpasses anything else they've created before, a new unified lighting system, scriptable and breakable walls and boards and full-blown 5.1 sound.

Inevitably, gamers want to know about the multiplayer features, and whilst id Software insist the focus is purely on the single-player, they have hinted at four-player support in its current stage of development. We're wondering – is it four-player because of the Xbox version they're building? How can only four-players be dynamic enough on the PC? It has been stressed that there is no co-op support (boo!) so can four-player deathmatch be exciting enough?

Some good news is that Doom III will be VERY "moddable", and we can imagine the fan base will come up with some exciting stuff. Oh, and we look forward to the return of the BFG!

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Doom III is said to rely solely on the single-player experience... But since Quake, id Software's single-player experiences have been somewhat dull, with only the multiplayer playability being the real strength. To add to that, it appears the action in the game will be heavily scripted which may not leave much room for long-term replay value.

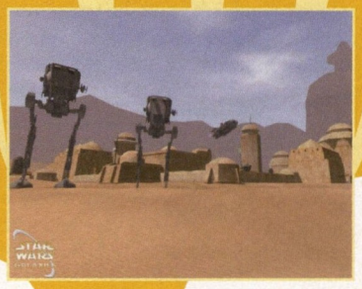
Star Wars Galaxies PC/Xbox/PS2

Developer: Verant/Sony Online

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's something geeks have dreamt about since the early 80s – the chance to truly exist within the *Star Wars* universe. For those with a good internet connection, all those daydreams are going to come true.

FEATURES: As with most persistent online worlds, the *Star Wars* galaxy will never sleep – if you're not online, other players will continue to go about their duties and your local hive of scum and villainy might be a different place the next time you log on. Add this EverQuest-like level of addiction with the ability to be a Jedi, Bounty Hunter, Rogue or a host of other characters and you can imagine just how popular Galaxies is going to become. So what do you actually get to do?

Becoming a Jedi will be the hardest thing to achieve. The path to becoming a Force user will require patience and training, although once a Jedi you will still have the option to "fall" to the dark side if you choose to stray from the path of good! Players will also be able to work for the Empire, join the Rebel Alliance or simply go out on their own private adventures. Incredibly, if you rank high enough in the Imperial army, you'll even be able to command small squads of Stormtroopers controlled by the AI, which will work like ordering pets around – you'll tell them to guard, patrol and attack etc. Other players can have droids and alien pets to follow them around and help out on their travels.



You'll also be able to own a vehicle and a variety of cool *Star Wars* gadgets, as well as a typical adventurer's inventory. The level of detail and depth for gameplay choices in the game is already quite astounding, and we look forward to seeing how it all operates in action. Clearly though, Galaxies could become the most popular MMORPG of all time, and we all know that a large and faithful player base is what makes a game such as this worth playing.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Can too many Jedi spoil the broth, so to speak? Or likewise, too many Bounty Hunters? Will enough players choose a variety of character types to make the game interesting so the game is not a sea of "bad-ass" rogues?

Disaster Report PS2

Developer: Irem/Agetec

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's the world's first disaster survivor sim.

FEATURES: Imagine innocently wandering down the street when a massive earthquake hits. One minute you're enjoying the nice weather, and the next you're dangling into a gaping crater and buildings are collapsing all around you. This is the concept of Disaster Report. It's like Survival Horror mixed with a slower-paced adventure game like ICO. There's no one to shoot, just an earthquake to survive.

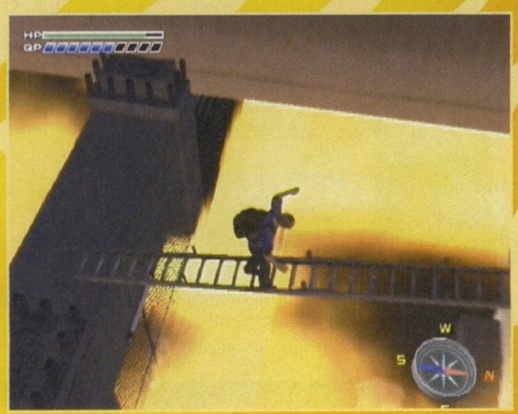
Your character can jump, climb, and hang about the place with the best of them, and your only real objective is to survive the disaster that befalls the island that you're on. You'll need quick reflexes and a good puzzle-solving brain in your head, plus the ability to get to the bottom of a government conspiracy that just so happens to be intertwined into the story. Luckily, you're a hardened newspaper reporter.

You'll need to combine objects to create makeshift tools, use bikes and boats and help rescue other survivors in an effort to escape from the island.

Your controls consist purely of movement and interaction commands, as well as the ability to shout (presumably to warn others, or get yourself rescued) and the option to assume the "bracing position". It's just crazy enough to work!

This really could be a unique gaming experience to make a nice change from the piles of re-hashed games on the market, much like the brilliant ICO. We're hoping that Disaster Report will turn out to be a "left field" classic.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Well, it's certainly never been done before, so there's always the chance that the game simply isn't going to turn out to be fun! Also, if the earthquake events are heavily scripted, playing the missions could become a little too predictable – especially if it's trial and error gameplay.



[Above] Dash through this dangling cable car to safety. [Below] Er... Dash across this dangling ladder to safety.

Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicle GCN

Developer: Game Designer's Studio/Square

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's the return of Final Fantasy to a Nintendo platform. The last one was back in the SNES era!

FEATURES: Details on Crystal Chronicles are still few and far between, and whilst we imagine it's a return to the classic traditional fantasy role-playing for Squaresoft, there are a few features that are definitely out of the norm. For starters, it appears that the Game Boy Advance link-up will be a crucial component to playing the game. In fact, four players can hook up to the GameCube with their own GBA for their own personal character stat info screen (amongst other options). Players will need to communicate with each other to know exactly how the other players are faring. Whether you will definitely need a GBA to be able to play the game at all is still not determined, but we imagine Squaresoft won't make it an absolute necessity. We hope not.

What we do know is that the classic Moogle characters from other FF games make an appearance, along with airships and other classic FF elements. The game also seems to feature real-time action combat as seen in the old Secret of Mana games.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: The style of artwork could be deceiving, but Crystal Chronicles looks pitched at a younger market than traditional Final Fantasy titles. We're hoping it's not Final Fantasy "lite".

[Above] **Sadly, the surreal character designs from the last FF games have been dropped for a more "normal" look.**

Silent Hill 3 PS2/Xbox

Developer: Konami

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: The other Silent Hill games have been thoughtful, suspenseful and scary as hell.

FEATURES: It's time for a female lead – whoohoo! You play as an unassuming girl named Heather, who decides to go do a bit of shopping at her local mall, only to get caught up in a horrible nightmare. As opposed to Heather losing a family member or some such concept, you will simply want to get her out of this twisted alternate world alive. New to the series with Silent Hill 3 will be the introduction of some more obvious combat. Semi-automatic weapons even come into play, with certain sections of the game breaking out into freakish action along the lines of Resident Evil or The Thing. However, this will only be peppered throughout the usual slow and eerie adventuring, with the emphasis definitely still on disturbing imagery and creepy sound effects.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: The move towards more typical survival horror mechanics worries us slightly. We don't want to be fumbling with machine guns and an awkward camera system. Been there, done that.

[Above] **Expect just as many twists and turns as in any good mystery.**

Mario Tennis GCN

Developer: Camelot

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: Mario Tennis on N64 is still our favourite tennis game – it's about time for a new one!

FEATURES: Camelot have already revealed that Mario Tennis for GameCube (along with Mario Golf) will rely heavily on the successful Nintendo 64 incarnations. Basically, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". They have however let on that there will be new mechanics to the gameplay for players to learn to get the most out of the new version. There's no doubt that Mario Tennis will be one of the most fun multiplayer games this year, based on the fact that the N64 version was so strong that it still gets more screen time at our regular Hyper multiplayer nights than even games such as Halo or Pro Evolution Soccer 2.

We also hope they expand upon the Mario Tennis RPG concept that was so brilliant on the Game Boy.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: If Camelot sit too heavily on their laurels, Mario Tennis could possibly under-deliver – the original was awesome but we still want new play modes and multiplayer variations, not just a visual update!

[Above] **The characters will look even better than Super Smash Bros Melee!**

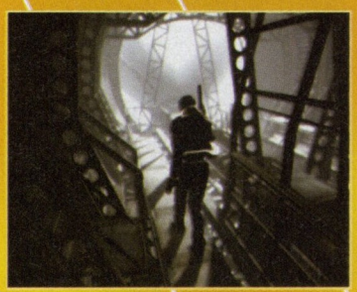
Resident Evil 4 GCN

Developer: Capcom

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's the first Resident Evil title to bravely change the tired gameplay mechanics and ditch the pre-rendered graphics.

FEATURES: Not to be confused with Resident Evil 0, Resident Evil 4 will be a brand new survival horror experience starring Leon S. Kennedy. After exhausting itself on PlayStation, Resident Evil looks set to enjoy a real re-birthing on the Nintendo GameCube with this title. Whilst Resident Evil 0 plans on introducing a new inventory system, Resident Evil 4 appears to be going even further and making more revolutionary changes to the game. No environments in Resident Evil 4 will be pre-rendered, with the whole game running off the GameCube in real-time. This could result in some truly exciting and unpredictable situations in the game, and we simply can't wait to be infected by the all-new virus! Ewww.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Losing the pre-rendered environments could mean a potentially problematic new camera system, and a more traditional third-person action game approach. But it's still early days yet.



[Above] **It's Leon's turn to stumble across a deadly new virus. Poor chap!**

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic PC/Xbox

Developer: Bioware

[Above] **Prepare for some crazy lightsaber fights between numerous Jedi.**

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: Bioware make brilliant games (the Baldur's Gate series anyone?), so finally the *Star Wars* license will be done justice with a deep and involving RPG.

FEATURES: Set over 4,000 years before the first *Star Wars* film, Knights of the Old Republic sticks you smack bang into the epic struggle between the thousands of Jedi and Sith. Your party consists of three characters at any one time, from Wookiees and Droids to Twi'Leks and more... and lets not forget Jedi, of course. Travel from Tatooine to Dantooine, Kashyyyk and the Sith world of Korriban in your quest to help end the dramatic struggle that's taking place across the galaxy.

Bioware have included a tasty character creation system, a unique interactive combat system that plays out based on your characters' stats, mini-games galore (like manning gun turrets when travelling in space) and a light and dark Force element to the story that will tempt the player during the adventure. The game also utilises the rule-set from the *Star Wars* pen and paper RPG for the stamp of approval.

Oh, and there may even be expansions available down the track for download on Xbox Live!

HOW IT COULD FAIL: All of Bioware's great RPGs so far have been set in an isometric perspective that requires little graphics processing with all the grunt going into stat crunching and dialogue. Will this gorgeous up-close 3D world leave room for lots of RPG depth, or is this aimed at the mainstream?

Championship Manager 4 PC

Developer: Sports Interactive

[Above] **You can watch the match in real-time or just view the highlights.**

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's the best sports management sim ever devised, and this time it's "sporting" a real-time match engine.

FEATURES: Championship Manager is something of an acquired taste. For starters, you need to have some kind of interest in football (that's soccer to you), and then you need to have an interest in the tactics and management behind a particular team's ambitions for greatness. Once you're hooked though, it's for life.

Championship Manager 4 will be the first in the series to take the match report into a real-time 2D match engine, so you can actually watch your players in the game and see how they perform during the match. Sure there are 3D match engines on the market, but nothing can come close to CM's genius stat-crunching system that results in truly realistic and manageable results. It's going to be the next best thing to actually managing a real-life football team.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: How bug-free can such an ambitious 2D match engine really be? Will we find ourselves witnessing the same plays and mistakes over and over or is there enough realism to avoid such flaws?

Final Fantasy X-2 PS2

Developer: Squaresoft

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's a continuation of the absolutely sublime experience that was Final Fantasy X.

FEATURES: Final Fantasy X-2 will be the first Final Fantasy game to receive a direct sequel, making this quite a unique release. Fans will be pleased to find that Rikku and Yuna now get to take centre stage in this adventure – in more revealing outfits no less!

Many of the locations from FFX will be revisited, with Yuna and friends trying to help sustain the Eternal Calm which seems to be under threat from some new evil.

Exploring the towns will allow the player to climb and jump, which leads us to believe that the gameplay in FFX-2 will be distinctly different to that in FFX. It seems that players might be able to use an airship to tackle missions in any order they choose, for a more non-linear and mission-based game. Oh, and did we mention that everyone's packing heat? Yes, pistols seem to be the new preferred weapon...

HOW IT COULD FAIL: As far as spin-off games go, it's no surprise that FFX-2 does not contain the same kind of gameplay as FFX, but we just hope it's a concoction that is just as good!

Mojibribon PS2

Developer: NanaOn-Sha

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: Mojibribon is coming to us from the warped mind of Masaya Matsuura – one of the most innovative designers in the industry.

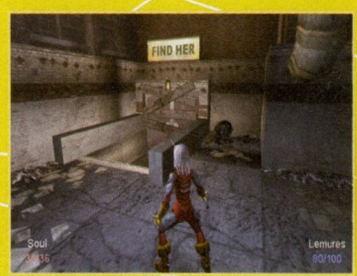
FEATURES: NanaOn-Sha's last game, Vib Ribbon, was a breath of fresh air. It featured black and white graphics and a game world that was literally created on the fly by your own audio CD. For their next title, NanaOn-Sha are getting even wackier.

Mojibribon is essentially Japanese calligraphy meets Vib Ribbon. Your character follows a spiral path on the screen and you must use the left analogue stick to input characters (which turn to speech) in time to the music. The environment, music and main character all evolve depending on how well you're doing. The art style is absolutely surreal, consisting of watercolour backgrounds complete with soft brushed scenery and ink spots. The main character is a playful looking ink outline, and already looks as cool as a PaRappa or Vibri. Mojibribon is certainly a bizarre concept, but we've come to expect nothing less from Masaya Matsuura.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Even the Japanese gaming market may not be ready for a title like this! Plus, Matsuura himself is unsure whether the game can ever be translated for the English speaking world.

The Lost PS2/Xbox

Developer: Irrational Games



[Above] **Some of the environments are very creatively designed.**

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: Irrational Games were responsible for System Shock 2, and they have a studio in Canberra!

FEATURES: The main character is Amanda Wright, a woman who loses her daughter under mysterious circumstances and is given a chance to enter Hell to rescue her. Amanda is only equipped with a knife, and must enlist help from a variety of bizarre entities with varying skills to survive the gruesome planes of the underworld. Through the nine circles of Hell, you'll be faced with combat situations and puzzles that can be tackled in a non-linear fashion. The emphasis on story is an important decision that should make The Lost a far more interesting experience than your usual third-person action/adventure. Our faith in Irrational Games to produce something special is rock solid.

Irrational Games originally began developing The Lost with the Lithtech engine, only to switch over to the Unreal Warfare engine early in 2002. This change may have slightly delayed its release but it's a big change for the better. The evil characters and huge sprawling levels are soaked in a twisted, freaky atmosphere, making this the kind of game you won't want to play alone at night.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: This is Irrational's first console action game, so it's untested territory with these guys. We believe they're creatively minded to not just churn out a generic third-person action adventure, so our hopes are pretty high for this one.

Killer 7 GCN

Developer: Capcom

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It looks set to turn cel-shading on its head with a serious injection of mature and dark stylings.

FEATURES: Capcom are keeping the details on Killer 7 under wraps, but from what we can tell, this will be a film noir style survival horror game that does its best to shock and surprise us with crazy camera angles and unexpected plot twists.

It seems that the playable character is a strange old man in a wheelchair with seven different personalities, and you must use your different personas to defeat your rival, Kun Lan, a deadly criminal. How exactly you get around your disability isn't quite clear at this stage.

Killer 7 is incredibly stylised, with quite graphic violence and gore depicted in a flat and texture-less cartoon style. The visual style is so well executed that the game has the appearance of a mature anime. It looks really quite frightening!

HOW IT COULD FAIL: We really don't know much about the gameplay at this stage, and whilst the game appears to be quite unique, it could all turn out to be just another survival horror rehash, albeit with surreal graphics.

It's like a return to the flat texture-less look of the original Alone in the Dark!

Republic: The Revolution PC

Developer: Elixir Studios

[Above] Vote for me! *WHACK* Vote for me, alright?! *SMACK*

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's the world's first politician simulator, and yet it looks like fun!

FEATURES: Developed by London based Elixir Studios, Republic sports the controversial "Totality" 3D engine that promises to render an infinite number of polygons in real-time. What this means, is that you should be able to zoom all the way from a satellite perspective thousands of kilometres up in the air, all the way to the petals on a flower in a window box on the side of a house. The reason this is important, is that a main proportion of the game is all about observing your populace and keeping track of what people are doing all over the fictional country of Novistrana. Yes, every single person in the world will follow their own unique daily routine, and you can sit back like Big Brother and formulate a way into power based upon your oberservations.

Manipulation then becomes your greatest tool, as you trick, convince, brainwash or muscle people into supporting your political ideals. Expect to rise to power through the use of religion, military might, propaganda or just outright criminal activity. It's one of the most complex game concepts ever attempted, and it's almost ready for release.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Is the Totality engine just a lot of hype? Will the average PC even be able to handle such a graphics engine? It's a great concept on paper, but...

World of Warcraft PC

Developer: Blizzard

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It's our chance to finally be part of the richly detailed Warcraft universe.

FEATURES: This is one of few Massive Multiplayer Online RPGs that will seriously contend with *Star Wars*: Galaxies and Everquest II. "Explore familiar battlefields, discover new lands, and take on epic quests...", now you'll be adventuring across Azeroth up close. Choose from the classic Warcraft races and character types for your avatar, and then join thousands of other Warcrafters to investigate dungeons, huge cities, snowy mountains, magical forests and scorching deserts.

An important factor is that Blizzard are designing the game so that even casual players can feel a sense of progression in their limited hours of playtime – you won't necessarily need to play the game 24 hours a day in order to get the most out of it. There's an emphasis on combat, and a faster-paced style of game. Of course, you can just hang out and chat with friends if you feel like it!

HOW IT COULD FAIL: It'll be hard to draw players away from the already established online games, and upcomers like Galaxies. Are there enough players in the market for yet another big MMORPG? If Warcraft is last onto the scene...

[Right] **That, my friends, could be you! You'd have to be a Gimli fan I guess.**

Guilty Gear X2 PS2

Developer: Arc System Works

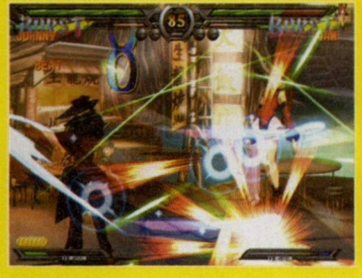
WHY WE'RE EXCITED: 2D fighting will never die. The mechanics work so well, and it's arcade perfect.

FEATURES: Packed with options and play modes, Guilty Gear X2 (Guilty Gear XX) sports some of the most bizarre fighting game characters ever – about 20, in fact. Ever wanted to play as a young girl who's actually a young boy but was brought up as a young girl back home at his kinky village? And if you thought that was confusing, wait until you get a load of some of the other characters: there's Faust, who fights with a paper-bag over his head; Chipp Zanuff, a former drug addict; and Jam, a master chef.

Aside from all that, Guilty Gear X2 has a great fighting system. The Tension meter builds up like a super meter in most other games, except it drains if the game detects that you're playing with cowardly tactics. The more risks you take, the more the tension meter builds up until the pay off – a super move. There are even instant-kill moves that are difficult to pull off, but can end a match then and there. A new feature is the burst gauge that can break an opponent's combo and allow you to counter-attack.

Guilty Gear X2 is one of those classic 2D fighting games that freaks of the genre must not miss out on at any cost.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: The game's quirkiness could be its downfall. Will you be able to find enough friends who understand the fighting system to play against?



[Above] **It's crazy and it's kooky, it's the Addams family (or Guilty GearX2).**

Enter the Matrix PS2/Xbox/GCN/PC

Developer: Shiny

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: *The Matrix* was a really fun film, which gives the developer, Shiny, a lot of very cool material to work with.

FEATURES: Enter The Matrix looks set to utilise an incredible fighting system, with players having access to fast, deadly martial arts AND high-powered weaponry (24 different guns, in fact). Not only that, but you'll be driving fast cars across cities looking for a telephone (hard line) and getting about in a strange hovercraft called the Logos. Imagine a cross between a gun-crazy game such as Max Payne (hello, bullet time) and an acrobatic beat 'em up like Buffy on Xbox, then put in a bit of System Shock 2 hacking and the kind of character depth reserved for games like Deus Ex. It's a real mixed bag of fun. You can move with the speed of lightning, slow down time, and even hack into the game itself.

Enter The Matrix should release alongside the next Matrix film, *The Matrix Reloaded*, in May. The game will not follow the plot of the movie, but it will feature the actors' real voices.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Is a blend of kung-fu, guns and stealth original anymore? Unless Enter the Matrix really screws with our minds, a generic action game ain't going to cut it for this cool license.

Everquest II PC

Developer: Verant Interactive

Look at the detail in that armour, and [Below] the amazing skin on the frog.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: It isn't called EverCrack for nothing.

FEATURES: Verant promise that Everquest II will introduce all-new features never-before-seen in a MMORPG. Big claims, but we're inclined to believe them after years of experience running what has become the most popular online game ever.

Players will be able to select from new and old races, and get stuck into an all-new class system that allows you to branch into different classes as you play. The new tradesmen character class will even allow you to progress without being involved in lots of combat. There have been improvements to all aspects of the game, from combat to questing, and new features will include the ability to own real estate and utilise forms of transport such as horses and boats.

Everquest II will use a new graphics engine that sports per-pixel lighting, dynamic environment mapping, and a fully-programmable surface shader system. Fancy, indeed.

Existing characters will not be able to transfer over to Everquest II, so every player will be starting afresh, but with all the new character customising options, chances are that's what every EverCrack addict would want to do anyhow.

Launching late in 2003, can EverQuest II rule the online gaming scene yet again?

HOW IT COULD FAIL: With all the other multiplayer worlds going online, it could be that the majority of players will be sick of EverQuest and want to move onto new experiences – like Verant's other new MMORPG, *Star Wars* Galaxies!

Freelancer PC

Developer: Digital Anvil

WHY WE'RE EXCITED: There hasn't been a kick-arse space combat game in aeons. If any game is going to deliver it, this is the one.

FEATURES: Talk about epic gaming... Wing Commander legend, Chris Roberts, has been working on Freelancer for years now, refining the Elite style gaming concept of "go anywhere, do anything" gameplay.

The open-ended universe allows you to fly random missions, or follow the story, depending on your mood. A reputation system will ensure that whatever you choose to do, it will affect the way your character progresses through the game. Interestingly, you won't necessarily be playing Freelancer with a fancy joystick, as the game has its own unique mouse-driven interface for space combat. Other than combat, you can choose to trade commodities, interfere in the local politics and interact with non-player characters in 3D interior environments.

There's also a multiplayer component that will allow players to hop online and join a persistent world with everyone going about and doing their own thing. There won't be anything quite like space-jacking another player's cargo.

HOW IT COULD FAIL: Freelancer seems to have struggled in development, suffering delay after delay, possibly signalling that the concept was too ambitious and the game has slowly been watered down in order to "work". We pray it still delivers the epic game promised.

[Above] The air-space (or is that space-space) is heavily populated.

HELLO, 2004

We'd like to think that games such as Thief III, Final Fantasy XII, Gran Turismo 4 and Fallout 3 will come out in 2003, but chances are they either won't be finished, or the PAL versions will be delayed until 2004. However, the games industry is unpredictable at best, and we just might see one of them in time for Christmas. Crazier things have happened. Even Duke Nuke'm Forever may see the light of day this year...

For now, we think there are more than enough games to stress our bank balance. Now, it's just a matter of prioritising them.

WIN WIN WIN

ENTRIES CLOSE FEBRUARY 12

WIN THE LORD OF THE RINGS!

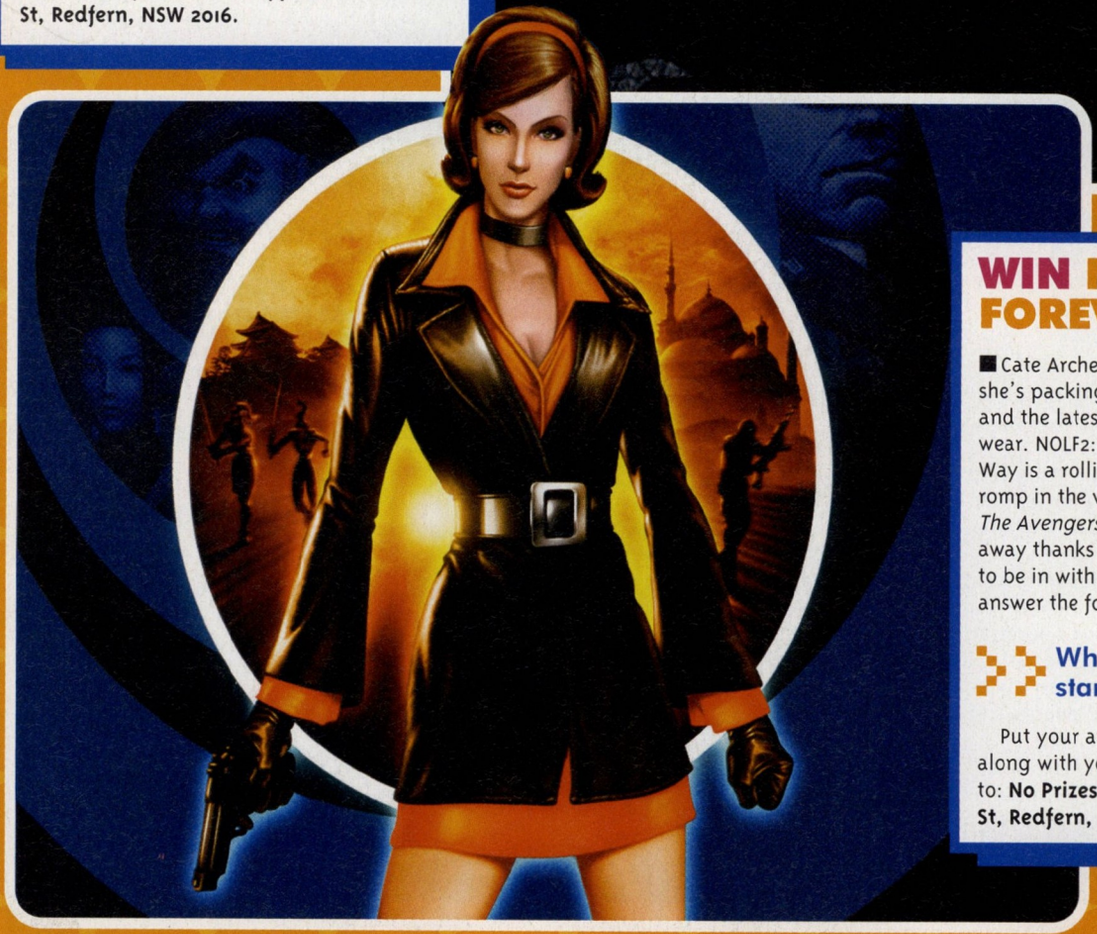
FOR XBOX

■ We're constantly amazed at how many gamers out there love *The Lord of the Rings* movies and games, and yet they still haven't read the bloody book! Thanks to Vivendi Universal, we're packing five copies of *The Fellowship of the Ring* by JRR Tolkien in with five copies of *The Lord of the Rings* for Xbox. Five lucky readers will win one of these handy bundles.

To be in with a chance to win, just answer the following question:

>> Name the Middle-Earth book that preceded *The Lord of the Rings*.

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and send it to: **Lord of the Prizes, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016.**



WIN NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2!

FOR PC

■ Cate Archer is back, and this time she's packing katanas, bananas and the latest Versache designer wear. NOLF2: A Spy In H.A.R.M's Way is a rollicking good shooter romp in the vein of *Austin Powers* and *The Avengers*, and we have five copies to give away thanks to Vivendi Universal. If you want to be in with a chance to win a copy, then answer the following question:

>> What does H.A.R.M. stand for?

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and send it to: **No Prizes Last Forever, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016. Redfern, NSW 2016.**

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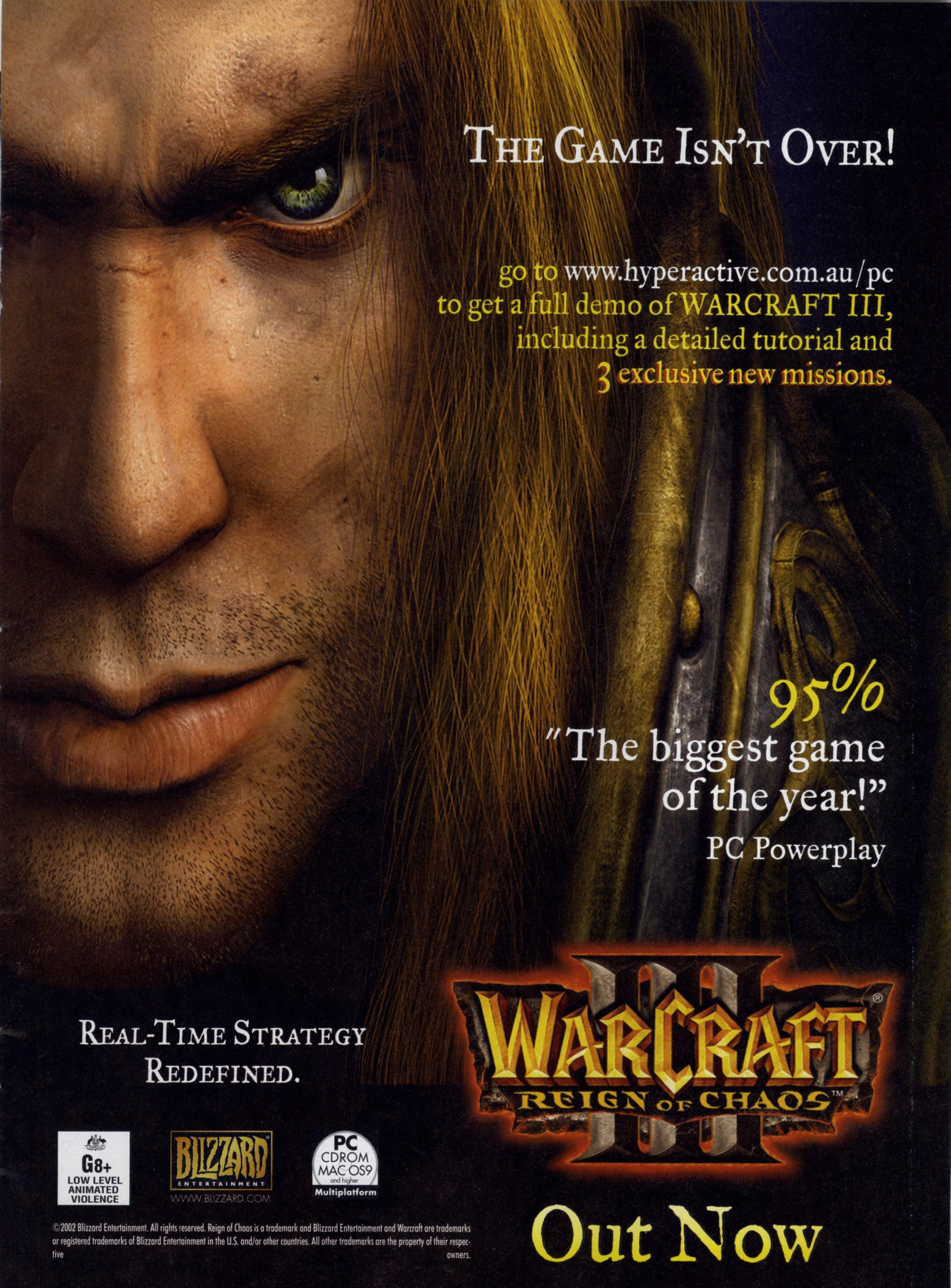
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Out Now

>> PS2

BMX XXX

CATEGORY: Pron >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >>
PUBLISHER: Acclaim >> **AVAILABLE:** January 16 >>

HYPER GETS NAUGHTY

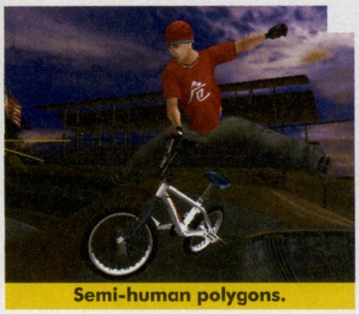
>> BMX XXX is not a traditional game, so this won't be a traditional preview. Instead of boring you all with polygon counts and hardware effects, we thought we'd take you through all the naughty stuff that will likely be cut from BMX XXX on release here in Australia. This way, you don't even need to play the game to see if some raunchy stuff survived the cut.

This is what BMX XXX is all about. Strippers and plenty of 'em. Successful completion of some rather "stiff" objectives will unlock footage of these lovely ladies doing their thing. Are you really missing out on anything if the OFLC decides to cut all this stuff? We'll let you be the judge!

>> BMX XXX continued...

You'd be more aerodynamic naked...

It's the Portaloo peeping tom!



Semi-human polygons.

Oh right, there's a game too... BMX XXX is all about low brow humour, and low brow culture in general. You have streets full of pimps and objectives that make this feel like "Jackass: The Game". This is one title that doesn't take itself too seriously (quite the opposite in fact), which makes the indignant uproar over it all the more amusing. There's nothing in the game that you won't already have seen on South Park and there's nothing in the stripper footage that flicking past SBS late at night wouldn't contain.

XXX has 8 levels all up, including two real life competition set-ups – UGP's Roots Jam 2002 and the Rampage Skate Park. The game is structured in much the same way as Tony 4. Except where Tony 4 had you collecting letters and rescuing fishermen, XXX inserts a healthy dollop of swearing, breasts and asinine activity. Your ultimate aim is, of course, to get into the "Scores" strip club and catch a little booty action. Getting to all that stripper footage is a tough ask for a number of reasons. Challenges don't really spell out what you're meant to do in the same way as in other games in the genre. Fair enough you might say, but when you're told to trick off a wall, but not which wall, it gets a little frustrating. Also annoying is that there's no "restart objective" option like in Tony 4. Screw up and you have to pedal all the way back and talk to the appropriate person all over again.

Challenges you'll have to complete including cleaning up a wide variety of shit (from bird to dog), getting animals to copulate, taking hookers places and dealing with their pimps, skitching police cars, relieving constipated construction workers (there's that excrement theme again), helping out a pyromaniac and so on. It all has about as much relevance to BMX riding as the objectives in Tony 4 had to skateboarding... so I guess we should applaud Z-Axis for at least trying to keep us amused.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: How about some gameplay?

Bare-chested men! Call the OFLC!

DIGITAL BABE YAYAS

The lewd humour and titillation doesn't stop at just pimps and strippers of course. XXX has one of the more interesting create-a-character options in the genre. Basically, the more stuff you've unlocked, the more naked your rider can become – male or female. The PS2 version has been censored overseas to cover up any nippular action, while both the Xbox and GCN versions will let you create topless G-stringed riders. Sweet? Not really. The rider models are rather disappointing. So what if you can create yourself a half-naked rider in a kicky mini skirt if she looks like a reject from Mannequins R Us? Indeed, there'll be no titillation from these blocky, out of proportion models. Who would have thought G-strings could look unattractive? Not us until we saw this game! Looks like we'll have to wait for Xtreme Beach Volleyball to get our digital babe yayas!

As you all probably know, BMX XXX was refused classification in this country. It's actually hard to imagine why. Some nudity (nothing that you wouldn't see in an M rated movie) and some tasteless jokes are hardly a danger to the nation's youth. Looks like the hype Acclaim built up for this one might have bitten them in the behind. Only the PS2 version will be released and censored (the aforementioned nippular action) here in Oz.

For all the hype, BMX XXX is just a misogynistic game laced with pre-pubescent humour and average gameplay. This is why we've just shown you all the risqué stuff in the game, so you can get your fill of XXX without having to suffer through actually playing it. Who says big daddy Hyper don't love ya? <<

WOW-O-METER

They should ban the gameplay.

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XBOX

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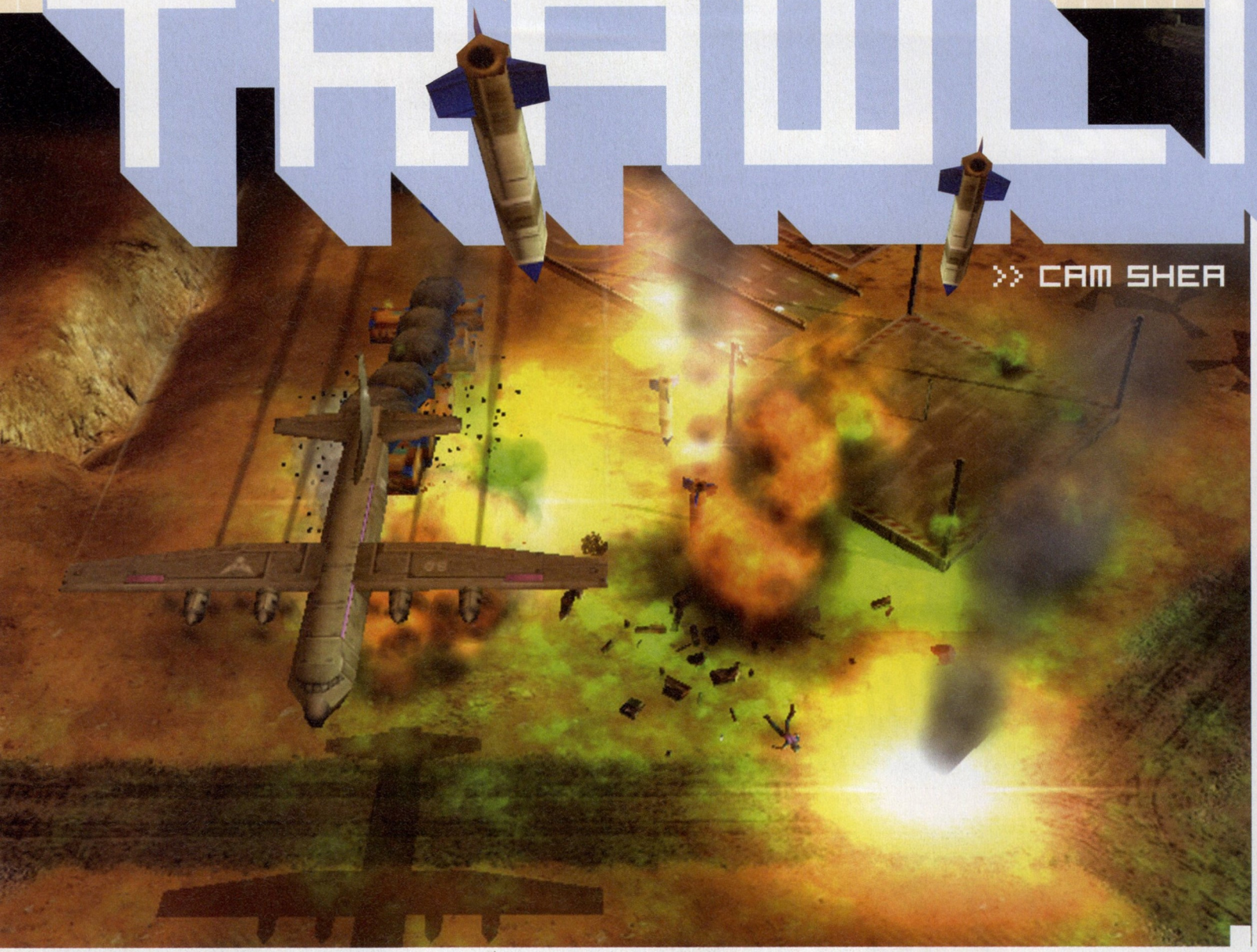
TRAWL

>> CAM SHEA



C&C Generals

http://westwood.ea.com

EA have recently been conducting multiplayer testing for C&C: Generals, so we got in on the action and found an all new C&C beast. The storyline doesn't continue on from Tiberium Sun but instead catapults us 20 years into the future within a war-torn world that features a mix of conventional modern military technology with "futuristic" upgrades. EA Pacific has taken certain licenses with the weaponry, but for the most part they've tried to create a somewhat realistic scenario. Indeed, one side (the GLA) may cut a little too close to the bone for some - this side is probably not recommended for gamers in Israel.

MASS-DESTRUCTION

C&C Generals is set at a time when China is rapidly becoming a true first world nation and rivalling the USA's position and influence on the world stage. China has changed its political tack somewhat, moderating its communist policies with elements of capitalism. The Chinese government decides to demonstrate its intent on becoming a respected world player by quashing the various GLA (Global Liberation Army) terrorist cells that have been causing trouble in the Pacific Rim and on their borders.

China succeeds in pushing the GLA out of the region and into mountainous areas of the Middle East. The GLA regroups and seeks revenge through a series of missions aimed at earning cash and attacking civilian populations, with an ultimate aim of gathering bio-toxic compounds and building a weapon of mass destruction. Thus, the USA picks up where China left off, pursuing the GLA's terrorist cells throughout the Middle East, starting out with an operation on Baghdad, one of its strongholds, then moving on to other locations.

The single player game will have three main campaigns, one for each faction. Each campaign will have eight missions, but rather than simply telling the same story from different sides, the narrative weaves across all three campaigns (China then USA then the GLA). It's the multiplayer we're interested in here, however, and with three sides to choose from C&C is an all-new ball game.

All three sides are very distinct, and have their own advantages, disadvantages and tactical styles. The USA has the most hi-tech but also most expensive units at their disposal, such as Comanche Helicopters, Aurora Strike Fighters and the lethal tomahawk missile carriers. The Chinese use both numbers and technology. For instance, get five or more Chinese infantry or tanks in one area and they receive attack bonuses. The Global Liberation Army is the most low-tech of all the sides but its units are fast - this side is the master of guerrilla warfare. The GLA are given a number of tools to allow for extremely sneaky tactics and are surprisingly strong when you know what you're doing. Some of their tactics (that are sure to offend some parties) include anthrax bombs, suicide bombers and car bombers.

Generals turns the BLAU up to 11.

Finally, McDonald's is eradicated...

Looks just like Redfern, only better.

There goes the neighbourhood!

I thought that button was the intercom!

They mount chain guns in the backs of Utes, drive dune buggies and raise (hilariously animated) angry mobs. To EA's credit, the GLA are made much more palatable through the use of clever, inoffensive humour when selecting and ordering units.

STEAL MONEY ONLINE

Resource gathering is completely different in Generals to previous C&C games. In short, forget about Ore or Gems, now there are static supply depots placed in various spots across the maps that each side must get to and dominate in order to generate income. The US forces send a chopper to pick supplies up; the Chinese use supply trucks; and the GLA simply send men to carry it back. Each side can also create internal means of generating income too. The US create a supply drop spot; the Chinese have hacker units that can steal money online (although you can also send in their Black Lotus commando to steal cash from foreign supply centers, among other things); and the GLA create a black market (and can also earn money using one of their special General attacks which reaps cash from kills).

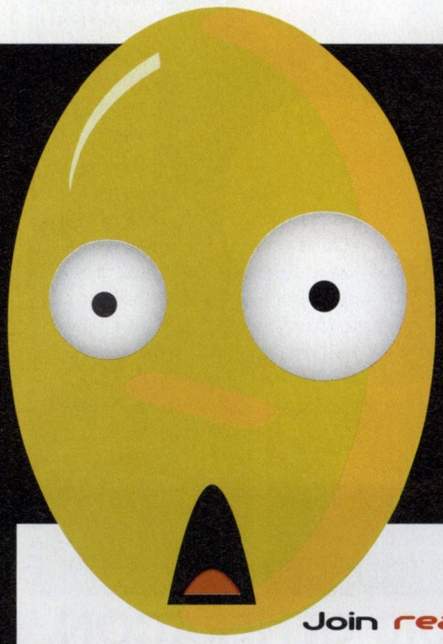
Another big change is that you no longer have to place structures around your command center. There are now bulldozers (you start out with one and can purchase more from your command center) that handle all your construction. This means you can build structures anywhere on the map and as far away from your command center as you want, which makes a nice change.

It's the General himself that changes the gameplay the most. He stays in your command center, and safeguarding him is obviously important. In addition to the normal tech tree, your General also has access to eight "General Powers" (ranging from extra unit level ups through to full on special attacks), but these only become available via experience. In order for your General to gain stars (experience) you need to engage in combat. Thus, it's no longer possible to be a base whore - if you wall yourself in you won't have access to the coolest moves in the game. If your command center is taken out, your General should get out in time, but you'll be unable to use your special weapons until you build another one for him.

The special weapons that can be earned via your General definitely represent some of the coolest action and most impressive visuals in the game. There's the USA's satellite mounted Particle Cannon which fires a huge but narrow roving laser beam that does huge damage on whatever it crosses. The GLA has an attack called the Scud Storm, which is comprised of a barrage of missiles carrying deadly toxins that cover the entire area in toxic green chemicals. China's Nuclear Strike is perhaps our favourite. Their nuke does amazing damage to a wide area, creating a huge mushroom cloud that plumes up revealing dead and scorched red earth underneath that damages any unit that touches it. Each special has three levels, depending on your ranking.

In all, this is definitely a game to look out for. Even at beta stage we're impressed by how balanced all three sides are. Full review soon!

VISIT HYPER ONLINE AT WWW.HYPERACTIVE.COM.AU



what the ?

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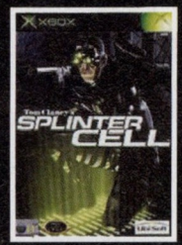

~~$99.95~~ $79.95

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MS. INFORMATION

AGATA BUDINSKA

>>It's been a while since I had a rant about the various web sites I frequent on the Internet. A big "Thanks!" to all who replied to the last rant on the subject – but no, I will not make Neofriends with anyone. I am a loner.

Back to this rant though, I've been thinking. The Internet has always been, at least for me, a posting board for the insane. Hell, there are plenty of sites that give you free web space (as long as you don't mind the hoards of pop-up ads that come with them) so it doesn't even cost the poor souls a cent. Life stories, fan sites, campaigns, online clans – you name it, there's a site out there that covers it.

Probably one of the more popular things to do with your newfound space, and also a chance to show off your coding muscles, is to make a personality test. A guy called Dane Carlson has used up a chunk of his server space to post a list of personality tests available on the net. Last count came to 899. Not all of them are actual personality tests (some are "What car suits you?" kind of tests), so that may not be an accurate total, but the selection is diverse – from "Which Muppet are you?" to "Which They Might Be Giants album are you?"

What someone needs to do is create a personality test, one where you enter all of your results from the previous personality tests to get a result. The only catch would be that the response would more than likely read "You have waaaay too much time on your hands."

Next, we should see a list of another popular "I am a code monkey" page filler – the Name Generator.

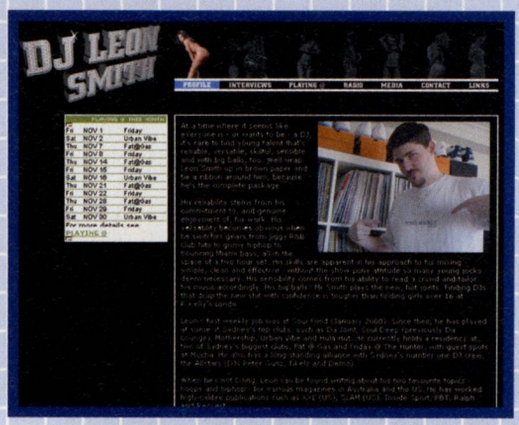
happymealwithoj@hotmail.com

Links

80'S TEES

www.80stees.com

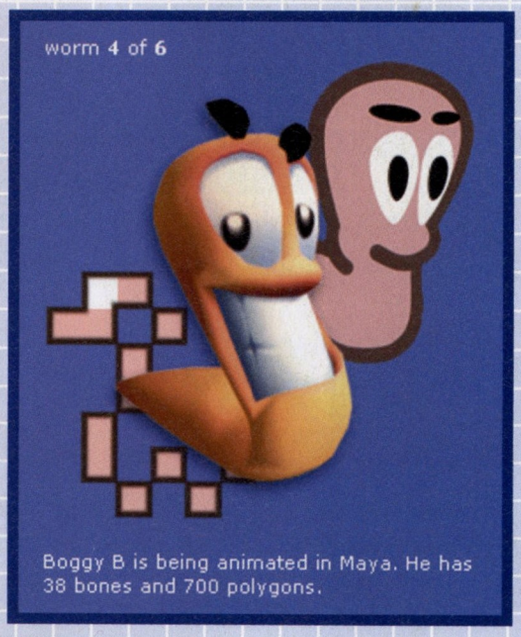
>> Don't let the very budget look of this site turn you off. 80's Tees is a veritable goldmine of cheesy T-shirt designs from the 80's (and 90's), available for order today! There are just so many funky ones here, so whether you want to get some hunky Saved By The Bell action on your chest or show your support for the sitcom hell that was Alf, this site can help you do it. Want to proclaim "Watchu Talkin' Bout?" as you walk the streets? Or how about "I Pity The Fool"? This site can help you. After all, as sad as the 80's were, there's nothing wrong with a tongue in cheek addiction to its popular culture exports.



DJ LEON SMITH

www.djleonsmith.com

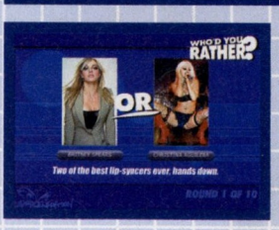
>> DJ Leon Smith is a man who wears many caps. Not only is he one of Sydney's up and coming DJs, playing a range of sellout hip hop and R&B, but he's also a long time Hyper contributor (under a different name of course). Check out his site, find out how many platinum chains he wears to bed, how many hoez (hi Mim!) he wakes up next to, and generally what he's all about.



WORMS 3

www.worms3.com

>> Worms fans direct your browser to this site now! We all know that Team 17 are taking the series into 3D, but on their official site they've just started a development diary that promises to be very interesting indeed. At the moment there's only part one available (which details the lead-up to official development of Worms 3) with at least another four on the way – a couple of which will hopefully be up by the time you read this. These will be truly fascinating insights into the design decisions and technology development behind one of our most anticipated titles.



LIQUID GENERATION

www.liquidgeneration.com

>> This site is a must for those of you with a broadband connection. Liquid Generation is a flash-heavy site with a whole range of amusing content. The games section has gems like "Shoot the Evil Carebears" and "Eminem Vs..." which pits Eminem against a whole bunch of other music stars in a Super Punch Out like game, through to flash recreations of Pac-Man and Frogger. The site also has streaming tunes from big name artists, amusing weekly news wrap ups, movie reviews, the ever entertaining "Whose Boobs" and much more.

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REVIEWS

>>XBOX

GAME OF THE MONTH 42

MechAssault

Microsoft Game Studios show us what mechs the Xbox so much fun.

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GAME THEORY

DANIEL STAINES

>> We all have strong opinions on what makes a good game, but how many of us have stopped to ask ourselves what makes a good gamer? Gaming is a pastime that requires participation on a variety of levels and this in turn demands a certain level of expertise on behalf of the participant. It's not enough to simply know how to play a given game skillfully – one must also possess a wide variety of auxiliary virtues that make masterful game playing a possibility in the first place.

Patience is the first virtue of a good gamer and it is arguably the most important of all. If you cannot exercise a considerable degree of endurance in your game playing, then chances are you will miss out on some of finest examples of our medium as a result. Impatient gamers will pass up on venerated titles such as Planescape: Torment simply to avoid enduring too much text or too many long conversations. They will abandon complex classics like Civilisation after no more than an hour and for no other reason other than the fact that "it takes ages for anything to happen".

The second virtue of a good gamer is a fastidious, almost anal attentiveness. If you can wander through a single screen of Final Fantasy VII without checking for any secrets or treasure chests, then you are not doing your job properly. Attentive gamers appreciate all the incidental details and try to root out all the hidden Easter eggs. If a game features flawed AI or profitable bugs, then an attentive gamer will quickly find them and immediately exploit them to his or her advantage.

And now for the last of the gamer virtues we'll be looking at this month: honesty. It might sound strange, but if you can't be honest with yourself while playing a game then chances are you're not enjoying it as much as you could be. Those that can truthfully admit their shortcomings learn from them and become better gamers as a result. Cheating might help you 0wnz0r n00bs, but it'll never give you the thrill exclusive to a hard-earned victory.

Send questions, queries and comments to:

game_theory@whenitsdone.com

HYPER CREW TOP 5

Eliot - Editor

1. Arx Fatalis – PC

"I can never resist an RPG..."

2. Ape Escape 2 – PS2
3. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City – PS2
4. Metroid Prime – GCN
5. Pro Evolution Soccer 2 – PS2

Cam - Deputy Editor

1. Metroid Prime – GCN

"Some of the most superbly crafted gameplay of all time."

2. The Straw Men – Michael Marshall
3. Abarat – Clive Barker
4. Wonderland Avenue – Danny Sugerman
5. High Concept – Charles Fleming

Malcolm - Art Guy

1. Metroid Prime – GCN

"I never thought it would be *this* good. Did anyone?"

2. Ape Escape 2 – PS2
3. Bounty Hunter - PS2
4. Pro Evolution Soccer 2 – PS2
5. Gungrave – PS2

Jackson - Hyperactive Guy

1. Splinter Cell – Xbox

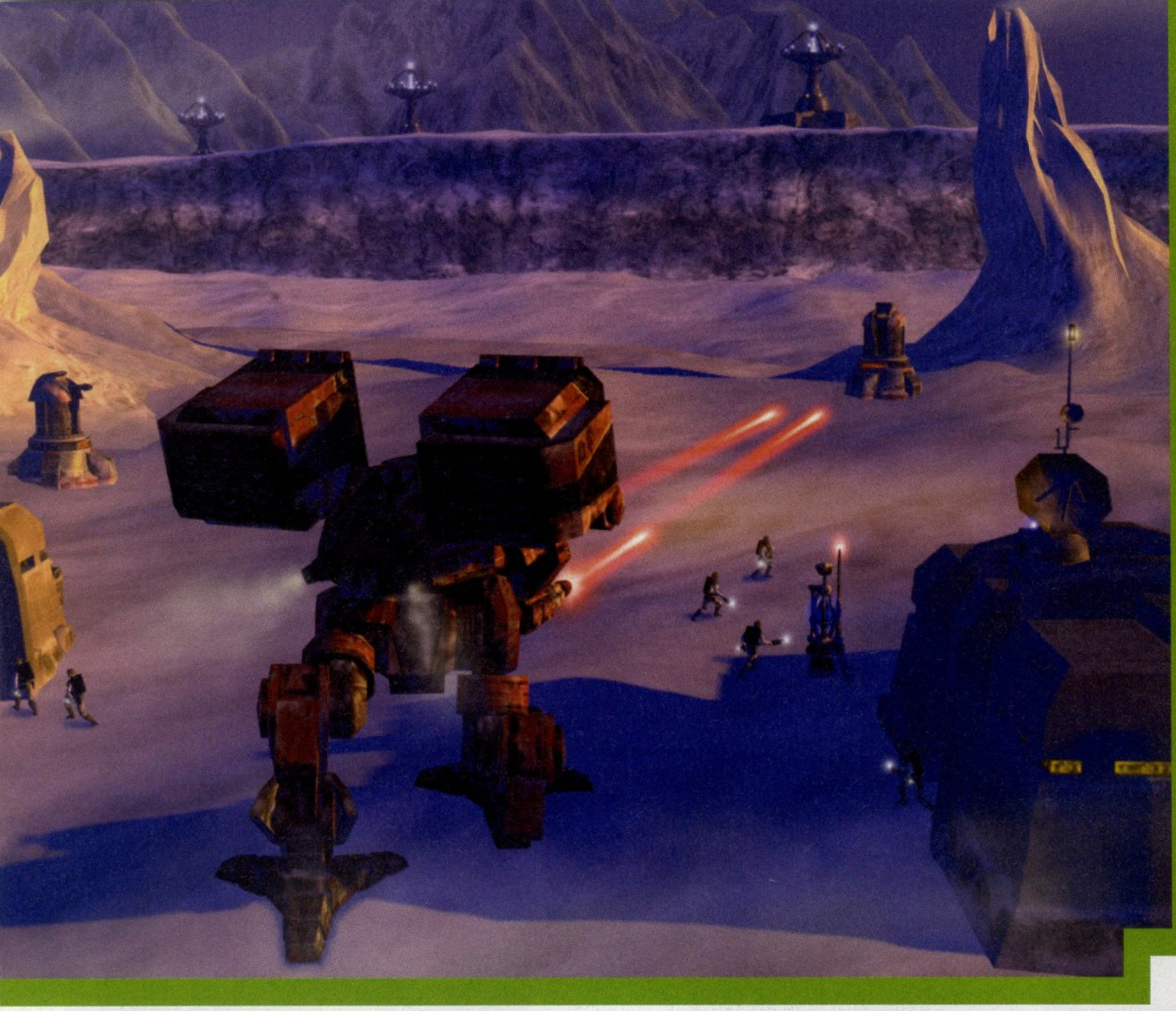
"Sensational sneaky stuff."

2. GTA: Vice City – PS2
3. Burnout 2 – PS2
4. Pro Evolution Soccer 2 – PS2
5. Jedi Outcast – Xbox

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM

The Overall Score – what's it all about?

90+	Excellent and worthy of a Big Rubber Stamp. Buy it!
80-89	Very good. This is a quality game, but not perfect.
70-79	Good, verging on average. Try before you buy.
60-69	Average, verging on bad. This game is badly flawed.
50-59	Bad game design and possibly not even worth renting.
0-49	These games simply suck. A total waste of money!



»XBOX

MechAssault

CATEGORY: Action >> **PLAYERS:** 1-8 >> **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

DANIEL STAINES mechs us boot up the Xbox.

Before we get into the review proper, do me a favour and forget everything you know about the MechWarrior franchise. Forget about arcane interfaces and baffling arrays of buttons and levers. Forget about intricate battlefield tactics and contemplative strategic thinking. Forget about laboriously pondering over customisation options and pedantically calculating the height/weight ratio of a fully equipped Mad Cat BattleMech. Forget about all that complicated crap and forget it now because none of it is going to do you any good in MechAssault. This game is pure, unadulterated capital 'A' Action. It is fast, it is furious, it is fun and by golly it is one of the best Xbox games since Halo.

WICKED FUN

MechAssault strips away the gritty, pretentious realism of previous MechWarrior games and leaves the player with a distilled core of pure stompy robot fun. Really, who wants to think about what kind of hydraulics a given mech has when they could be busy booting cars about like misshapen soccer balls? Aside from the refreshingly simple control scheme, the only information you need to recall with any regularity while playing this game is that pretty much everything can and probably should be destroyed. You will become a mechanical Godzilla and you will enjoy every single minute of it because blowing shit up is wicked fun. It's really that simple.

Of course, a minority of you may be unmoved by the joys of wanton destruction and this is why it's worth mentioning that MechAssault is an entertaining game even when one is disinclined to tear apart entire cities just for the hell of it. As soon as one progresses past the intentionally simplistic introductory missions, enemy mechs start appearing with an increasingly intense frequency and this makes for some truly memorable combat encounters that are always challenging but never difficult enough to entail frustrating repetition. The complete lack of any kind of mid-mission save function makes losing one of these sweat inducing battles quite irritating, but that's a forgivable annoyance given the rapid fluidity with which one progresses through the campaign itself.

As it stands, approximately eight to ten hours of persistent play will see MechAssault's single player campaign to an end. Maybe even less if you play it on the lower difficult settings. That's hardly an epic length, but nobody is going to

XBOX LIVE

LIVE, DAMN YOU! LIVE!

>> Okay, so it's apparent that MechAssault was developed with Xbox Live in mind and it's obvious that Australia doesn't have it yet and probably won't for months to come. Can we make a fair judgement, then, given that the best part of the game is unavailable to us? Well, no – not really. And that is why we will be doing a recap of MechAssault's online content once Xbox Live launches in this country. It's going to be a while, but trust us – it'll be worth the wait.

One-on-one **battles amongst the ruins of shattered cities** stand out as particularly enjoyable.

buy this game just to play it alone. Multiplayer is what MechAssault was made for and multiplayer is where MechAssault offers the most enjoyment. One-on-one battles amongst the ruins of shattered cities stand out as particularly enjoyable, with the level design and frantic pace imbuing participants with a sense of sweaty palmed desperation that makes every rocket fired seem more crucial to victory than the last. Of course, everything would be substantially better if this backwater country of ours had a broadband network capable of supporting Xbox Live, but that's not something we're willing to hold against the game itself. After all, it's not Day 1 Studios' fault that our communication infrastructure is stuck in the Stone Age.

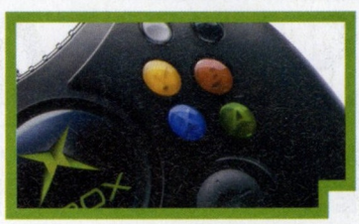
VERTICAL TANK

Given this temporary lack of internet support, what is really on offer in MechAssault is a preview of sorts – a tantalising taste of the pleasures that await once Microsoft get their big black box online down under. Having said that, however, it is worth noting that the multiplayer component does suffer from some rather grating flaws that seem intrinsic to the game and probably won't be affected by the arrival of online access.

!!! The first download for the US includes two new mechs!

The mechs, for example, are quite unbalanced and it is often the case that competitive match ups will be decided solely on the basis of which player is controlling the better machine. It is an unfortunate fact that the big assault bots rule the multiplayer roost simply because their smaller, weaker brethren aren't fast enough to compensate for their lack of power. Mechs without guided weaponry are similarly disadvantaged, and the result of combining these two individual faults into one is that only a few select models of vertical tank are worth using while the others languish in their own uselessness. Admittedly these problems can be surmounted by the liberal application of some regulatory house rules, but it is a disappointment to constantly have to use the same mech as your opponents for the sake of fair and enjoyable competition.

So that's MechAssault – the second best action title available on the Xbox and one of the most enjoyable games released in 2002. If this is any indication of the quality we can expect Microsoft to pony up for their online gaming network, then we need to get Xbox Live and we need to get it right now. The possibilities are staggering. <<



PLUS: Enjoyable single player campaign, excellent multiplayer.

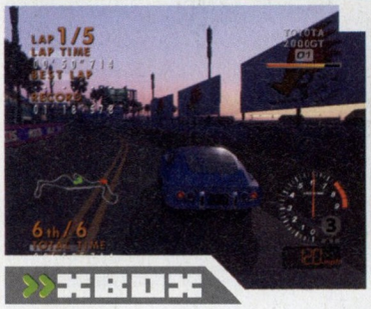
MINUS: Single player is a bit short, unbalanced mechs.

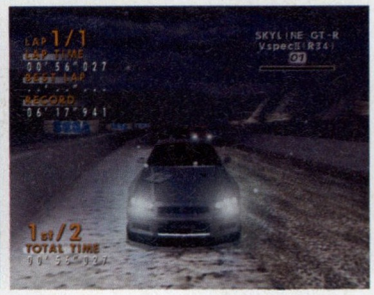
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	85	90

OVERALL

91

Explosive Xbox action. Buy it.





>>XBOX

Sega GT 2002

CATEGORY: Racing >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** Sega >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

ELIOT FISH burns the midnight rubber...

Sega GT was a Dreamcast delight. Not a perfect game by any means, but a small gem that pleased many a believer in the tragic white box. It's been a while coming, but the successor has arrived on Xbox (the machine some are calling the new Dreamcast – if only because it seems to be getting all the Dreamcast sequels...) and we took it around the corner a few times to see if it was worth waiting for.

SNAP HAPPY

You love racing games, you own an Xbox. Correct? Well, that's the way things are going, friends. From the High Octane pack from Microsoft, to the more obscure titles such as MotoGP, the Xbox is host to a feast of hotrods, and Sega GT 2002 is yet another shiny jewel in the Xbox racing crown.

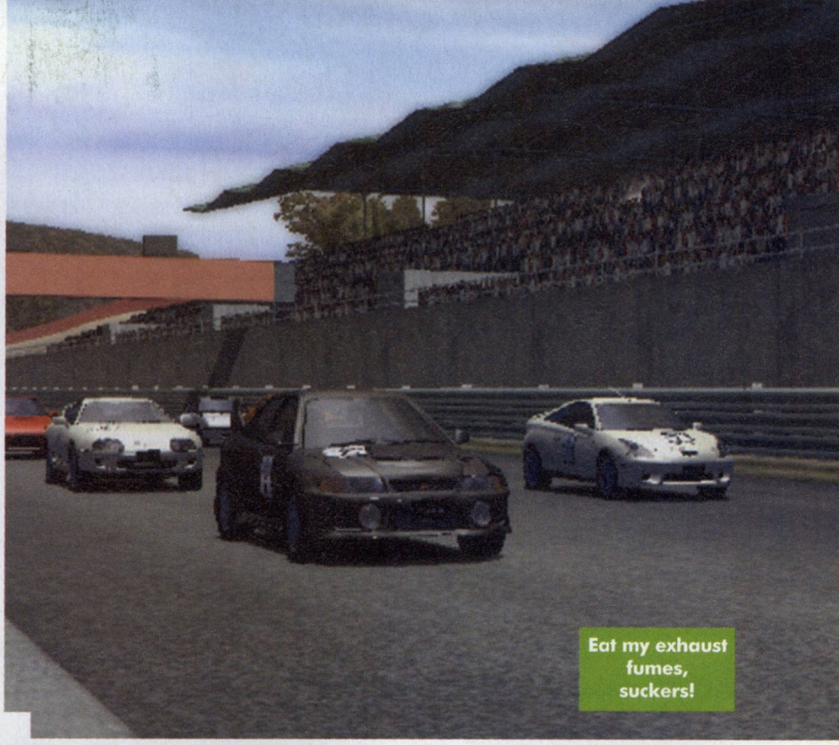
Load her up, and you'll see that the main menu offers a few delightful dishes to satisfy your gaming palate. The meat of the main meal is of course the Sega GT mode, but you can choose to nibble on Chronicle mode (featuring lovely old cars from yesteryear), perfect your times in Time Attack, or play against a friend in Quick Battle mode.

Inside the GT mode, you first must choose a make of car with a pitiful amount of cash and then stick it in your very own garage. You then take this little car out for a series of Official races that advance you towards a high class of license. The better the license, the harder the races become in all areas of the GT mode (and thankfully, the better the AI challenges you). There are also Event races that are great for earning wads of cash, and the variety of races here is great: drag racing, circuit races, same make races, super cars, winding roads and more. The fact that you can choose what you feel like racing helps to keep Sega GT quite an addictive game – you never get bored of trying to pass a certain stage in the game as you progress at your own speed.

You'll find that winning races becomes harder unless you start to spend your hard-earned cash on new parts for the car. This is done in a very user-friendly way that takes the car geekiness out of the game. You don't really need to know how a car works to buy upgrades, as the game shows you quite clearly how a certain part will improve the performance of your car. Different cars also gain access to different types of part upgrades, and you'll become quite determined to get the best parts you can.

Once you start rolling in cash, you might even decide to sell a car (you can store quite a few in your garage, and you even win some at certain stages in the game). You set the price and stick the car out the front of your house, which is great for bringing in the extra cash to

Which way to Vice City?

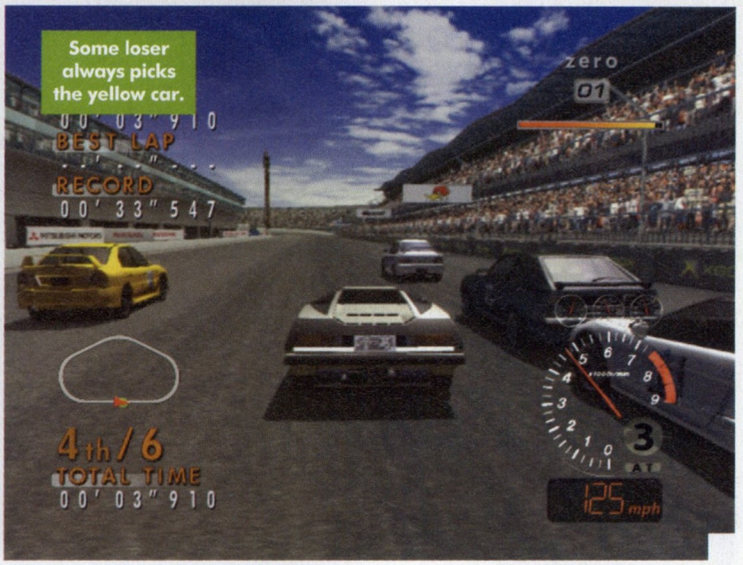

Eat my exhaust fumes, suckers!

The need for weed... I mean speed.

He drives me round the bend!

Turn off your high-beam dickhead!

Faster, faster, pussycat...



Damage is rated by **a small coloured bar** that decreases as you bump into things.

buy one of the really fancy set of wheels on offer.

BLURS AND STREAKS

Out on the track, Sega GT feels very arcade like. Car handling starts out quite poor, but as you improve your car or buy a better one, you'll start to appreciate how nice the driving feels. It's certainly a very accessible driving model. Sadly, there are only three camera angles to drive from, and there is absolutely no damage model. Damage is rated by a small coloured bar that decreases as you bump into things, and at the end of the race you must pay the cost of repairing your car. It works well enough.

As far as the AI goes, it's not terribly exciting stuff. Other cars tend to stick quite strictly to their racing line, rarely concerned with rear-ending you and ramming you out on corners, where human drivers would make way or avoid collisions. You can sometimes even see the whole AI pack racing through a corner in an exact "I" formation, as they all want to race the programmed racing line.

There is an odd visual quirk in the game when racing from the road cam: a series of odd blurs and streaks seem to occur around the edges of the screen whilst you're racing, as if Sega wanted to recreate the way wind buffets your eyes or swirls through the air. It just kind of looks a bit weird, and doesn't really help give the game the greater sense of excitement that it most definitely needs. One of the other flaws is the paltry selection of tracks. Instead of unlocking brand new tracks, Sega stick different parts together to create variations on tracks you've already raced. Most of the tracks are quite flat too, with very little in the way of exciting inclines or downhill runs, leaving the game a tad on the bland side overall.

However, Sega GT 2002 manages to keep you hooked as you strive for the ultimate prize, lovingly spending money on your car and perusing the showroom floor for a better deal. It may not be the most thrilling racing experience out there, but it's addictive enough to keep you coming back. <<

!!! The Used Parts shop allows you to buy kooky items to display in your garage like a billboard, potted plant or guitar.

PLUS: Addictive GT mode. Nice car models.

MINUS: Dull track designs. No damage model.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	85	83

OVERALL

83

As close to Gran Turismo on the Xbox as you can get.

>>XBOX

Unreal Championship

CATEGORY: FPS >> **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi >> **PUBLISHER:** Infogrames >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now

DANIEL STAINES feels a little lonesome.

Without Xbox Live supporting it, Unreal Championship (UC) is simply not very good value for money. That's not a particularly gentle way to start a review, but unfortunately it is the plain and simple truth, and we – as I'm sure you're aware – don't pull any punches here. UC *needs* Xbox Live to fulfill the entirety of its potential, because that is essentially what the game was built for. One can talk about splitscreen and System Link play until the proverbial cows come home, but we all know that local area multiplayer solutions simply don't hold a candle to a well run online server in terms of convenience and diversity. The Internet is where it's at, kids – take that away and you essentially take away the heart of the entire UC experience. And then what are you left with?

INTRINSIC WEAKNESSES

Well, not much, really. As a solo game played against bot opponents, UC is moderately enjoyable at best and doesn't offer the kind of long-term attraction necessary to warrant a full price purchase. This isn't because the single player game is bad or poorly structured in itself, but rather due to the fact that bot AI is simply not yet sophisticated enough to offer a consistently realistic challenge in arena based first person shooters. Although they generally perform rather admirably in all four game modes for the first couple of hours or so, it doesn't take long to discover the bots' intrinsic weaknesses and this severely detracts from the fun to found in playing them.

Games like Bombing Run and Capture the Flag, for example, are generally enjoyable because of the camaraderie that emerges from the interaction of individual team members working towards a common goal. With bots, however, this camaraderie is non-existent and the result is a bunch of team games without any real teams to participate in them. Of course, playing straight deathmatch dissipates this problem somewhat, but even in that context the AI suffers from a set of readily exploitable defects that make the artificiality of the whole single player component annoyingly evident. I don't care how many times they can call my mother dirty names: until bots show some semblance of consistent pattern recognition, they'll never make for a compelling FPS opponent and this fact is more plainly evident in UC than any other game we can think of.

But hey, that's only the single player component. As is the case with almost every other game of this type, the single player section of UC is something of a virtual boot camp for rookies to prepare themselves before jumping into some real multiplayer action. So what about multiplayer, then? We've already established that it is in desperate need of an internet gaming network a la Xbox Live, but what exactly is it about the multiplayer options

Let's destroy this Xbox from the inside.

Emperor Palpatine is top of the table.

I'm gonna bust a cap(tion) in yo ass.

They have the ball, but I have the balls.

On the technical end of the spectrum, **the framerate is abysmal...**

currently available that don't cut the mustard so far as general enjoyment is concerned?

NOTHING SHORT OF HERCULEAN

Well, it all depends on exactly what multiplayer option you're talking about. Splitscreen multiplayer in UC fails to impress for a variety of reasons. On the technical end of the spectrum, the framerate is abysmal and often makes any kind of accurate aiming or precise movement untenable to all but the most deft handed of gamers. Yes, we all like high definition textures and insanely detailed architecture, but since when do they count as trade in for consistent framerates and fluid gameplay? The less-than-intuitive control scheme and crushed perspective necessitated by splitscreen gaming already makes getting a headshot hard enough, thank you very much. The extra impossibility afforded by terrible framerates is definitely not appreciated.

Okay, so let's talk about System Link. There's nothing wrong with System Link play in Unreal Championship per se. It doesn't suffer from any of the problems associated with the previously discussed splitscreen option and is quite obviously the best way to enjoy the game outside of Xbox Live. But see, and this is the thing, just how often do you think you'll be playing Unreal Championship over a LAN after you purchase it? Think about it: even for a two-player System Link game, you'll need two Xboxes, two televisions, two copies of the game and another person aside from yourself willing to play it. Start talking about eight-a-side team deathmatches and the amount of organisation required becomes nothing short of Herculean. Do you really think this kind of event is something that will happen often enough to justify purchasing the game before Xbox Live is available?

!!! We'll be taking another look at all Live capable games once the service is locally playable.

If you're like most gamers, then the answer to that question is 'probably not' – and that's exactly why Unreal Championship is not worth buying at present. Essentially, it is a multiplayer game crippled by the temporary lack of a multiplayer network, and a single-player game that suffers from poor framerates and poor artificial Intelligence. Wait for Xbox Live and then we'll reconsider. <<

PLUS: Insanely detailed textures and architecture.

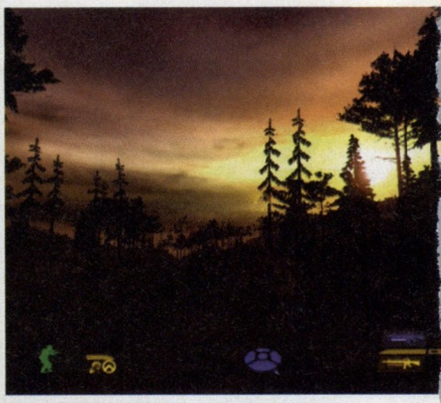
MINUS: Absolutely terrible framerates, dull single player.

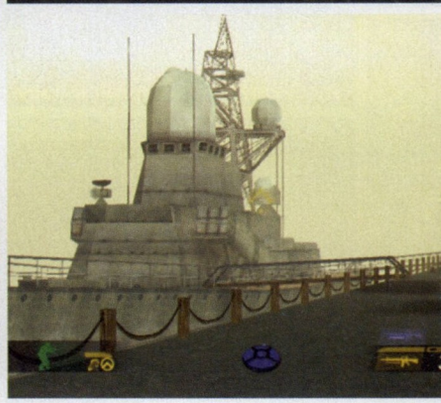
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
75	75	80

OVERALL

75

We'll re-evaluate this when Xbox Live comes out, but for now...





>>XBOX PS2 GCN

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

CATEGORY: Squad-based FPS >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** Ubi Soft >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE loves to roll in the dirt.

The greatest enemy in America's history is to return in 2008, says Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon. That romantic Red Menace, the greatest threat to the Western way and the tormenter of today's leaders throughout their youths is wholly uncontroversial and strangely reassuring. In today's placeless terror, drawing the Iron Curtain once again so plausibly gives meaning, once more, to us versus them. So, take your team of Ghost peacekeepers and save the day to the Xbox's hard-disk.

POTATO RECON

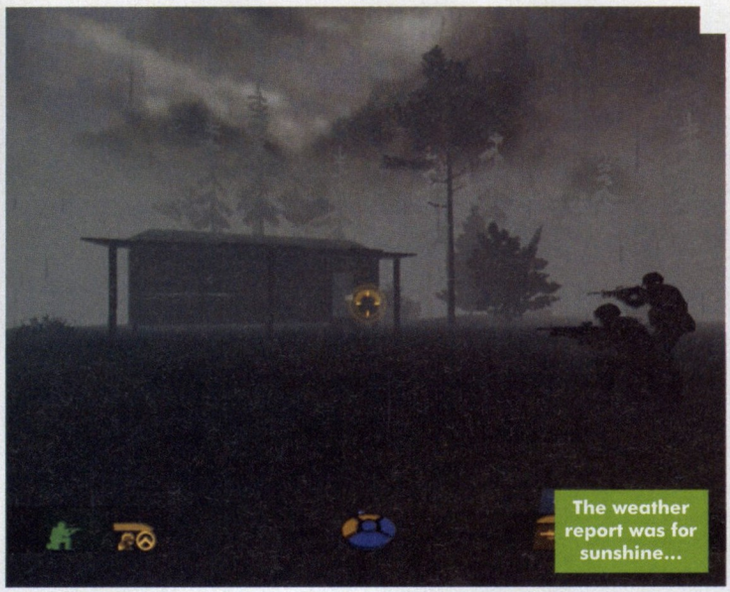
We were warned to expect plenty of PC ports such as this, thanks to the PC-like hardware and operating system of the Xbox, and to be fair, it does make a nice addition to the Xbox library of games, but Ghost Recon is a game we have seen before. It's also a game that, for Australians, currently lacks Xbox Live play.

Yet, like Cam capturing BMX XXX 'screenshots', there's no point obsessing over the unattainable. Patience is a virtue, and Ghost Recon manages to provide a challenging, if dry, squad-based tactical first-person shooter. It begins with some functional visuals, depicting sweeping rural vistas, crumbling eastern-European architecture and the odd potato crop in some of their glory. Draw distances are far from spectacular, while you can perilously expect to witness a target vanish beyond the visual range curtain like magic, while textures and objects are unsightly at close range. Despite these problems, the visuals do create a fairly consistent depiction of Eastern Europe. Real? Heading that way. Drab? Totally.

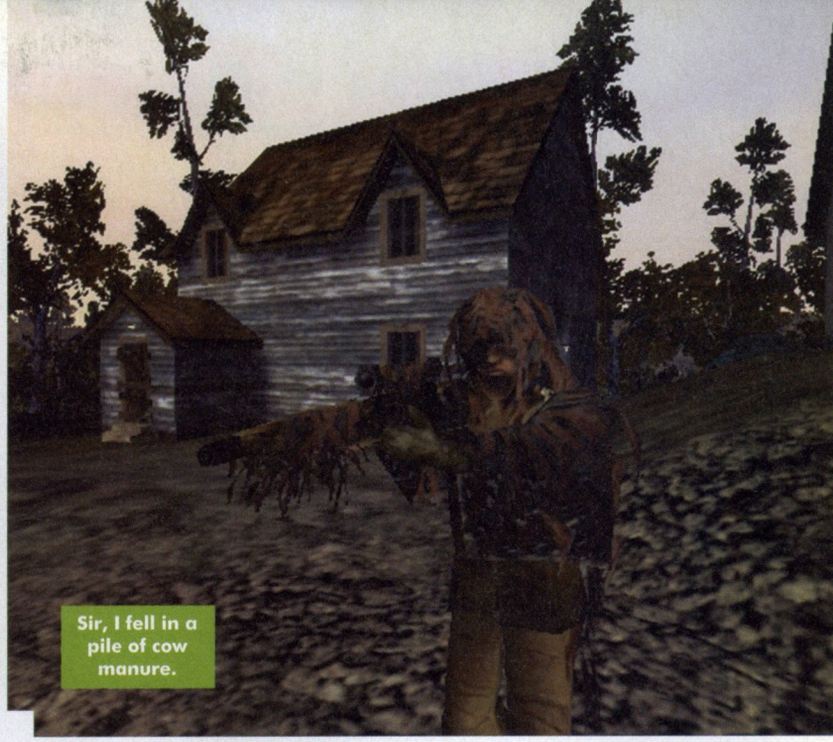
The sound is a little friendlier, with nice variety in ambient sound effects. There are bird noises in the forest floor, wind whistling over your head atop the mountains, and eerie silence at night – that is, until the bullets start whizzing past, although some more cries of chaos would have given both the enemy and your squad mates a touch more life.

The game's mechanics and controls reveal the game's PC roots, with an obvious difficulty in combining action buttons with squad commands. Yet Red Storm has admirably provided a system only initially daunting, that still empowers the tactical aspect of the game. The map is not generous enough in the accuracy of its waypoint-placement grid, making it difficult to order a squad to congregate beneath trees or closely beside a cliff. However, the combat principles of cover and angles are preserved within the game.

Assigning each of the two squads available with up to three soldiers allows for a deliberate approach from each mission, catering for the



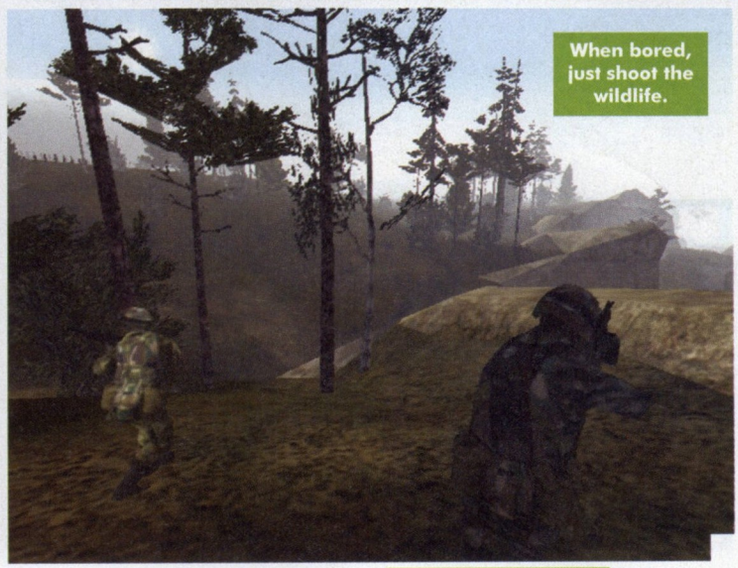
The weather report was for sunshine...



Sir, I fell in a pile of cow manure.

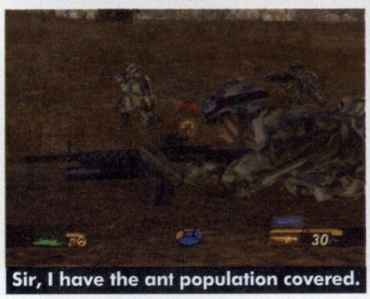
You'll be entrenched in this game.

Look out sir, mosquitoes!



When bored, just shoot the wildlife.

Won't anyone come out and play?



Sir, I have the ant population covered.

Take your team of Ghost peacekeepers and **save the day to the Xbox's hard-disk.**

gung-ho ammo-hungry blaster-style approach, coolly-efficient sniper emphasis, or special weapons flexibility. Yet flexible responses to individual scenarios within each mission is also handled nicely by the mid-game commands. Developing a bond with individual members, respecting their life, is also essential, as big Smitty won't be all that helpful for your next mission with a head full of lead. Also, success is rewarded with bonus skill points, making your soldiers' aiming and other attributes better as the game progresses. The unlocking of more skilful, better-equipped soldiers is also achieved by the completion of optional objectives.

!!! As with other currently Live-less games, we'll re-review the multiplayer aspect of Ghost Recon when local online play is active.

CRACK TRIAL-AND-ERROR SQUAD

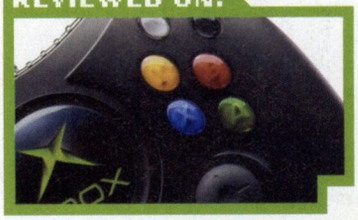
Although favouring snipers, the 15 missions' structure is varied and challenging. On the higher difficulties however, the enemy's competence means that surprise is the best method for success. The level of patience and care required to sneak up on each group of enemies is difficult to maintain, and thus trial-and-error gameplay is generally the preferred method for success. Even in non-stealth clashes, the ramifications of the death of a squad mate, as well as his hard-earned stat improvements, means that regular use of the anytime-save is an almost irresistible temptation.

Meanwhile, the enemy AI is competent, sending troops scurrying for cover at the first sign of fire. Close combat battles, particularly in and around buildings, are a little bewildering with regards to how and why exactly enemies react, but for the most part, a vigilant player should be satisfied.

All in all, Ghost Recon is probably a worthy addition to your Xbox library, especially if this genre is a favourite. With a perfect fitting two-player split screen co-operative mode, many of the hassles associated with babysitting two sets of troops are forgotten. Each map could have been larger, and the visuals more immersive, but Ghost Recon might just be your ideal mix of tactical combat and shooting splendour.

Although not offering the four-player functionality, Ghost Recon is superior to its major Xbox rival Conflict: Desert Storm for its tactical flexibility, varied environments and believable combat principles. It's just a shame Live hasn't landed yet, as the online mode could be tremendous. <<

REVIEWED ON:



PLUS: Solid tactical combat. LIVE play down the track...

MINUS: Average visuals. No LIVE play until... when?

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	84	83

OVERALL

82

Considered and rewarding, but critically Liveless.

Can you spot Bill Gates in the crowd?

André the Giant eat your heart out.

Guys, he's over here – scoring!

XBOX

NBA Inside Drive 2003

CATEGORY: Sport >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

ERIC CABRERA says he'd like to have a beer with dunkin'.

With an abundance of basketball games out there, it is often difficult to size up which one suits your tastes best. This year's offering of Microsoft's NBA Inside Drive franchise presents a solid basketball game aiming at a mix between arcade and simulation gameplay. Although solid, there has not been much of an improvement in terms of gameplay from its 2002 counterpart and this proves to be a dampener on the improvements made elsewhere in this title.

UNNATURAL FORCE

In terms of graphics, the 2D crowd remains stale and atmosphere is non-existent. The player uniforms also look weird, as it appears that some kind of unnatural force is holding each person up by the shoulders. Furthermore, although the superstars such as Kobe and Shaq have recognisable faces, the faces of lesser known players seem to be very generic, which detracts from the gaming experience. On the up-side, the player models are brilliantly implemented, with smooth and fluid transitions coupled with relatively realistic movements.

The sounds in NBA Inside Drive 2003 are also excellent. The four commentators, Kevin Calabro, Marques Johnson, Kenny Smith and Akemi Takei, are superb. Each brings something different to the table. The amount of variety means that the commentating rarely becomes boring, which is a problem in a lot of other sports games.

However, NBA Inside Drive 2003 plays almost exactly like its predecessor. This is both a good and a bad thing. It's good because the gameplay of last year's game was solid and popular with basketball fans. However, those who are expecting an overhaul of the game's engine will be thoroughly disappointed. The problems with an absolutely unnatural rebounding style along with some collision detection problems remain.

!!! NBA 2K3 will finally be released in February, so start saving your pennies.

DRAFTING ROOKIES

A sorely lacking commodity in Inside Drive 2002 was a franchise feature, which would allow the player to enter the shoes of a general manager and maintain a team for multiple seasons. This has since been implemented in NBA Inside Drive 2003 sufficiently but it is not revolutionary. All of the standard features are there, including trading players and drafting rookies, but is not even close to the detail provided by Sega's NBA 2K3.

The one aspect of this game that stood out as revolutionary, compared to previous basketball games, is the create-a-player function. No longer is it possible to create a player that has a 99 skill level from the beginning, you have to earn it. A player starts with a certain amount of points for you to allocate, which generally equates to an average NBA player. From then onwards, the development of the player relies upon his performance in games.

Overall, this is a solid game that will provide you with your yearly basketball fix if you like a mix of arcade and simulation. However, it's only a small step from its predecessor and if you're looking for a specialist type of game, you should wait to try out NBA Live 2003 and NBA 2K3. <<

PLUS: Solid basketball game. Great create-a-player function.

MINUS: Minimal gameplay improvements from last year.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	79	80

OVERALL

81

Inside Drive still plays it a little too safe.

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»PS2

Ape Escape 2

CATEGORY: Action/Platformer >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** SCEE >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** TBA >>

ELIOT FISH doesn't want to escape from this monkey island...

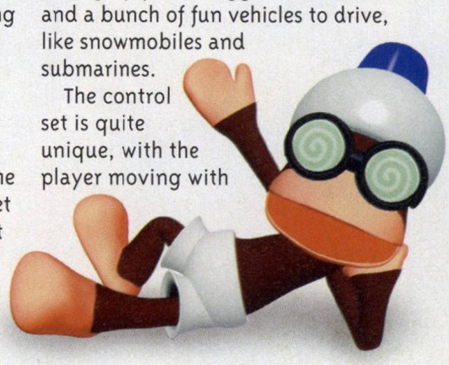
Who was it that said only Nintendo could make brilliant platformers? Ape Escape 2 delivers everything that was kooky and fun about the original, but with ten times the cool factor and depth of play. If you're looking for a PS2 platformer to impress your Mario-loving friends with, then this is the one.

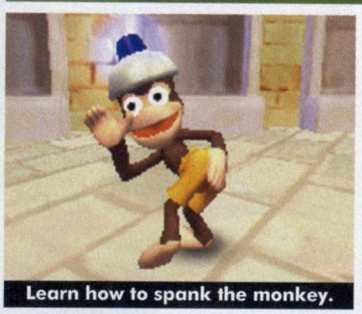
GOOFY-LOOKING

There's something undeniably charming about a goofy-looking chimp with big googly eyeballs. And when that chimp has a name like "Henry" and is wearing yellow shorts and doing a little boogie... well, we're sold. Ape Escape 2 is all about silly monkey humour and clever platforming fun. From its anime-style characters and cut-scenes to the bizarre cast of monkeys that you'll learn to know and love by name, this is Sony's best attempt yet at a Shigeru Miyamoto style piece of platform gaming. The developers have even started the game in few small Italian villa styled levels, with very similar colours and textures to Super Mario Sunshine. The character models are also beautifully smooth and rounded, with great fluid animation. It's almost as if the aim was to subconsciously tip off the gamer that Ape Escape 2 is intending to be as delightful as Nintendo's plumbing platformer. And it very almost reaches those same dizzying heights.

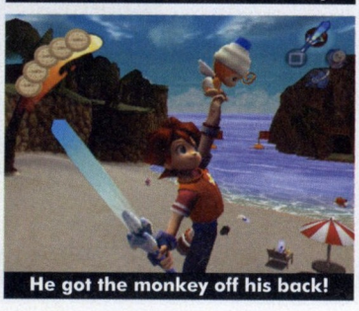
Ape Escape 2 might be a far more simplistic gaming experience than Super Mario Sunshine, but it's almost every bit as pleasing. Your character, Hikaru, learns to utilise a whole range of different Gotcha Gadgets over the course of the game that offers the player variety in play and a unique way of re-approaching earlier levels to access previously hidden areas. The main aim is to simply catch all the monkeys in every level, however there's only a minimum number you have to collect before you can move onto the next level. This way, you'll never get bored, but can go back and re-visit levels for the challenge of getting the harder to find monkeys. The gadgets you have at your disposal range from the monkey catching net (which you can't do without) to a water-cannon, helicopter armlet, bananarang, hulahoop and other wacky items that each give your character a unique ability or way to interact with the world to alter play. There's even a Remote Control car that can get under cracks or go through pipes to trigger switches, and a bunch of fun vehicles to drive, like snowmobiles and submarines.

The control set is quite unique, with the player moving with




Learn how to spank the monkey.

Chimpionship Manager.


He got the monkey off his back!

Put your pants back on, dad.

Ape Escape 2 is all about **silly monkey humour** and clever platforming fun.

the left stick and control gadgets with the right stick – you actually flick the stick to swing your net and so on. The buttons are used simply to select and change the gadget you're holding. Jumping is executed with the shoulder buttons. It takes a while to get used to, but it's quite devilishly implemented and allows for more complex combinations of actions that would otherwise be too difficult to pull off. However, there are times when the controls do tend to feel a little more unwieldy then perhaps they should. As long as you get used to Ape Escape 2 and stick with it, you should be fine. It's slightly convoluted, but works a treat.

DANCE MONKEY DANCE

Some of the most enjoyable moments in the game are when you return from completing a level to spend your coins on rewards and look through the monkepaedia at all the odd little monkeys you've collected. Every monkey has a name, funny quote, stats and snapshot. Some are truly hilarious, and it's bizarrely addictive trying to complete your monkey collection and then giggling at the funny animations. Other rewards include cool little manga comics, crazy monkey fables, music, concept art, secret photos of monkeys and a collection of brilliant mini-games. There's Dance Monkey Dance in which you make monkeys dance much like Bust-A-Groove, Monkey Climber (a bizarre climbing puzzle game) and then there's Monkey Football, which is a game in itself (someone's been playing Pro Evo over at SCEE)! The reward system seems endless, and you'll spend hours pumping coins into the machine to see what pops out next. It's a great idea that pushes you to go back out there and complete levels just so you can collect more rewards.

!!! Sadly, some of the manga rewards weren't translated...

Levels range from Egyptian pyramids to a haunted castle, icy mountains, a tropical beach, a casino, a dinosaur era, ninja hideout and much, much more. There are also a collection of well-designed boss fights. Overall, there's a very good balance of challenging (yet not frustrating) level design that is both clever in design and accessible to the casual gamer. The ideas in the game are so unique, however, that seasoned gamers will discover as much joy in playing Ape Escape 2 as anyone else. The most fun we've had platforming on the PS2 in a very long time. <<

PLUS: The monkeys, the gadgets, the rewards, the humour.

MINUS: Some levels have a few camera problems.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	83	89

OVERALL

90

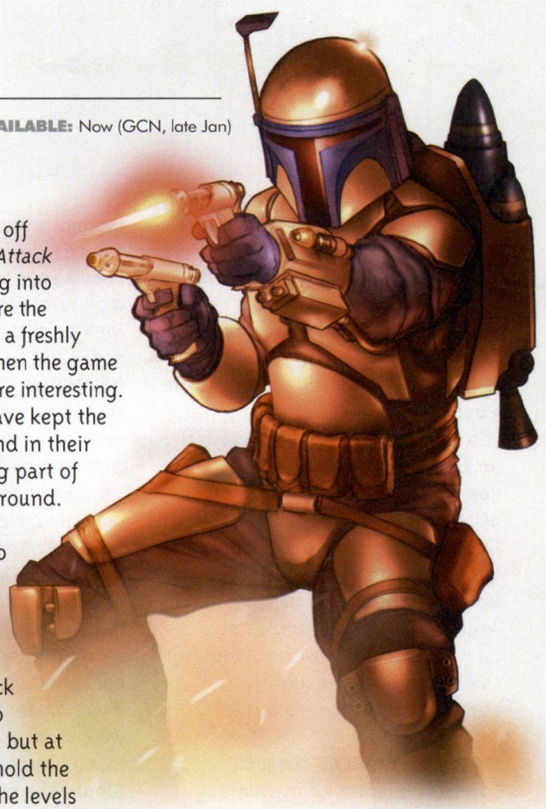
Best. Monkey. Game. Ever.

»PS2 GCN

Bounty Hunter

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** LucasArts >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now (GCN, late Jan)

ELIOT FISH dons the helmet of all helmets.



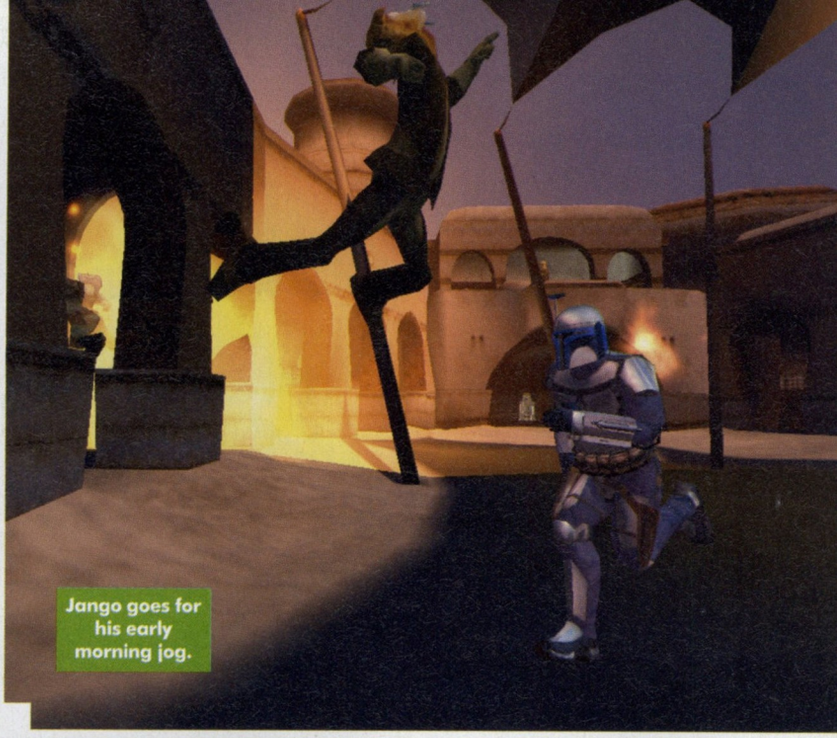
As the hologram transmissions came in on LucasArts' Bounty Hunter, the Hyper Council was beginning to get a little concerned that it would go the way of many other *Star Wars* games of recent times. Preview versions we had played looked a little crumbly 'round the edges, and it appeared that possibly a great concept was getting a bog-standard treatment. Well, once the EA transport offloaded their cargo for us, we popped Bounty Hunter into the PS2 to see whether it was tough, mysterious and enigmatic like Fett, or wimpy, obvious and bland like Jar Jar Binks.

THANK THE MAKER

A bounty hunter game from LucasArts has been at the top of the list for *Star Wars* gamers for a long time now. Now that one has finally been made, it has years of fanboy daydreams to live up to. *Star Wars*: Bounty Hunter, thank the Force, manages to deliver. From the very first level, you realise that LucasArts have taken this game very seriously. That is, they obviously did not want to just churn out a generic third-person action title that had Jango Fett armour slapped on it to try and make it sell. Straight away, Bounty Hunter slips you into the middle of a hair-raising mission that stretches across one incredibly large and well-designed level. You don't have your jet-pack yet, but you do start out with quite a few of the cool Bounty Hunter gadgets. Not only are you adept at hand-to-hand fighting, but you have your dual blaster pistols, a whipcord for tying up enemies, the ability to check out your surroundings from the internal HUD of the Fett helmet, plus you can fire off those poison darts from *Attack of the Clones*. It's not long into the game that you acquire the flamethrower ability and a freshly repaired jetpack – and then the game proceeds to get even more interesting.

The level designers have kept the jet-pack squarely in mind in their designs, and it's as a big part of exploring and getting around. Sometimes it's not so obvious which way to go (thank the maker) requiring you use your helmeted noggin' a bit more to see where you can get Jango to jet-pack or climb to. There are no hugely difficult puzzles, but at least the game doesn't hold the player's hand or make the levels

The only New Zealander not in LOTR.

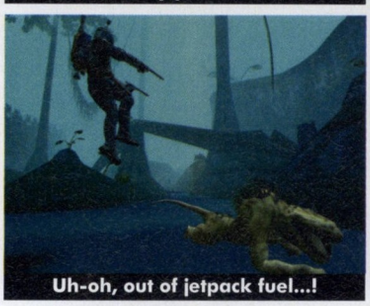


Jango goes for his early morning jog.

The Ewok hunting season is open...

Ahh, not my precious bacta!

You're dud, dud orl ef yew!



Uh-oh, out of jetpack fuel...!

Wait until Boba hears about this...

LucasArts have pulled off **a far more believable Coruscant** than Raven could ever have hoped to create.

mind-numbingly linear. They're also quite convincing *Star Wars* locations that are littered by seemingly functional buildings and machinery, as well as droids and people. In fact, some levels are even reminiscent of Jedi Knight. Not Jedi Knight II, the undercooked Raven shooter, but the LucasArts sequel to Dark Forces. For instance, LucasArts have pulled off a far more believable Coruscant than Raven could ever have hoped to create. Lanes of space traffic cruise overhead, the odd spacecraft zooms by, and by golly there are actually quite a few people going about their business (some who might have a bounty on their head if you check your visor display). These more populated and less obviously linear environments in Bounty Hunter give the player a better sense of a living, breathing world that's there to be explored – not just a game level that wants you to go from A to B.

AS YOU WISH...

Jango Fett has been really well-realised in the game, however, there are a few problems with the camera and controls. For starters, the camera becomes quite troublesome in all these huge levels where you need to look up, down and around to see where you need to go. Pulling the camera back behind Jango with the shoulder button only seems to work momentarily, as it sometimes wants to drift back to a more cinematic and cool looking perspective rather than a playable one. This is coupled with some slightly twitchy controls when it comes to jumping and also grabbing and climbing. The camera tends to go absolutely spastic when you're jumping through the air and trying to lock on to a target. Despite these gripes, the game is still enjoyable – just expect a few very frustrating moments to struggle through.

Whilst many of the levels are a bit run and gun, you have quite a nice variety of ways to tackle a situation thanks to your array of gadgets and the range of weapons you discover along the way. This is all tied in with some very good cutscenes courtesy of ILM – there's a serious layer of polish here, folks. The game also spouts forth a host of cool unlockables as you complete your missions – there's even a whole Dark Horse comic to be unlocked. Oh, and they actually got Morrison and Walsman to record Jango and Zam's dialogue.

Bounty Hunter is a bantha load of great *Star Wars* action, so don't be nervous, go get suited up. <<

!!! Another Bounty Hunter game is on the way – Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter. It's totally unrelated to *Star Wars*.

REVIEWED ON:

PLUS: Interesting spacious level design. Fast-paced action.

MINUS: Camera problems. Loading times. Slowdown.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	90	83

OVERALL

84

Wow, a new *Star Wars* game that doesn't suck!

>>PS2

Sly Raccoon

CATEGORY: Platformer >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Sony >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now (GCN, late Jan)

CAM SHEA carries a sickle to work. We're too scared to ask why.

Sly Raccoon is the latest offering from Sucker Punch, a company that has been toiling in virtual anonymity since back in the day when they were responsible for the very promising title, Rocket, for the N64. Their follow-up, Sly Raccoon, is also a platformer but the similarities end there.

THIS GAME IS SICK(LE)...

Sly Raccoon is an interesting game in terms of approach. In a world where stealth is the "big thing" in game design, thanks to titles like Metal Gear Solid and more recently Splinter Cell, it seems an obvious fit to take a 3D platformer and inject stealth aspects. And while you're at it, why not take the dominant visual theme of the moment – cel shading, and throw that in, then cap it all off with a mascot-like character?

We're not trying to be cynical here – the mix of elements in Sly Raccoon actually work very well together. It doesn't feel cobbled together like you might expect. The main character, Sly, (voice acting aside) is very likeable, the visual stylee looks fantastic for the most part and the stealth focus has great promise. The premise suits all these elements well too. The basic storyline is that Sly comes from a long and prestigious family of thieves, but their most treasured book, the "Thievius Raccoonus" has been stolen and divided into five, with a master villain guarding each piece. What this boils down to is five main worlds, each with a bunch of levels.

Sly has his own little gang to help him on his thiefcapades – Murray the fat pink pig who drives the getaway car and will show up in the odd mission, and Bentley the nerd turtle who stays in touch via the binocucom to give you instructions and tips during missions. Sly has a fairly basic range of controls. He attacks with his sickle, but can also do some useful things with it, such as latch onto hooks to close grates or swing through the air. He can double jump, climb up pipes and ladders, and also use certain objects and areas to do stealthy moves, like pressing up against a wall and shimmying along or locking onto a narrow path to walk along. These are all achieved with a single button press, however, so there's no real skill required other than timing. With each boss that you beat, Sly learns a new move, whether it be the ability to jump and land on narrow spikes or to railslide along winding narrow paths.

AMAZINGLY CRAFTY

Each world has its own design theme, corresponding to its main boss (from urban gangsta to jungle voodoo), but ultimately each is structured in much the same way, with a selection of platform levels, mini-games and a whole lot of

RACCOON REWARDS

>>Each mission in Sly Raccoon has a safe that can be opened by collecting all the clues in the level. This will net you either a page from the Thievius Raccoonus (i.e. a new move) or a blueprint for the world you're in. Some of the new moves that Sly can learn include the ability to swim (so that you can hop back out of the water without using up a charm), slow down and speed up time, coin magnet (so that you no longer have to run directly over coins to pick them up), mines to lay and limited invisibility. It's a good reward system, but you'll need some serious patience to bother.

>> There are also racing competitions and **plenty of shooter style mini-games**, but most of them fall a little flat.

tenuously linked key collecting. Platform levels are all quite simple in design and nowhere near as non-linear as we were hoping. Some sections give you a couple of possible routes and you can attempt levels in any order, but that's really not good enough. Stealth components are only really used for visual effect, without really changing the game's standard platform gameplay in any meaningful way and the enemies feel like an afterthought. To be fair though, many of the levels are very stylish, and the stealth aspects combined with the excellent animation and "intelligent controls" make the game look amazingly crafty and fluid for onlookers. However, it always feels very simplistic during play.

Each world has a couple of mini-game missions, which succeed in bringing more variety to the mix, but not necessarily more fun. One of our favourites puts you behind a sniper scope, with Murray the pig making a daring run (complete with amusing running animation and cowering when enemies came too close) into enemy territory to retrieve a key. You basically just shoot the enemies that come after him to provide safe passage. Simple, but fun. There are also racing competitions and plenty of shooter style mini-games, but most of them fall a little flat for our tastes, especially when compared to the mini-games in titles like Ape Escape 2.

!!! Unfortunately, our Time To Crate-o-meter was broken this month.

Sly Raccoon is one of those games that we were hoping would appeal to gamers of all ages, but that ended up skewing much more towards the younger end of the market. It's just too short, too simplistic and too shallow for most of us. The much vaunted stealth aspects don't actually open the game up, so despite the lush visuals, boredom sets in pretty quickly. That said, it's still a very polished game, and would make the perfect gift for a younger sibling or the less-demanding gamer. <<

PLUS: Great presentation and stylish visuals.

MINUS: Gameplay could have been much more interesting.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	82	75

OVERALL

80

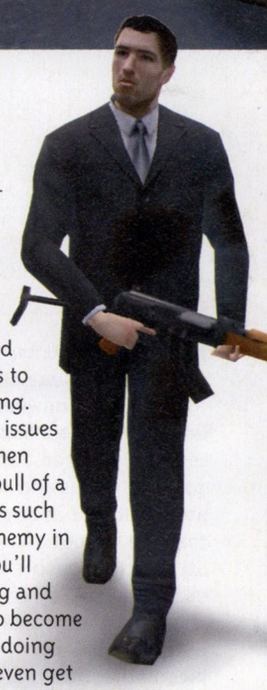
Sly Raccoon is an uninspired but polished platformer.

»PS2

The Getaway

CATEGORY: Crim Sim >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** SCEE >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now

ELIOT FISH remembers when games were meant to be games.



After three long years in development, Sony's much-hyped brit-gangster game, The Getaway, was unleashed this Christmas in a flurry of press releases and promotional blitzes. Touting itself as a groundbreaking piece of software that blurs the line between cinema and games, we slipped on our pinstripe suit, poured ourselves a sherry, and settled back into our favourite armchair for a great adventure around London.

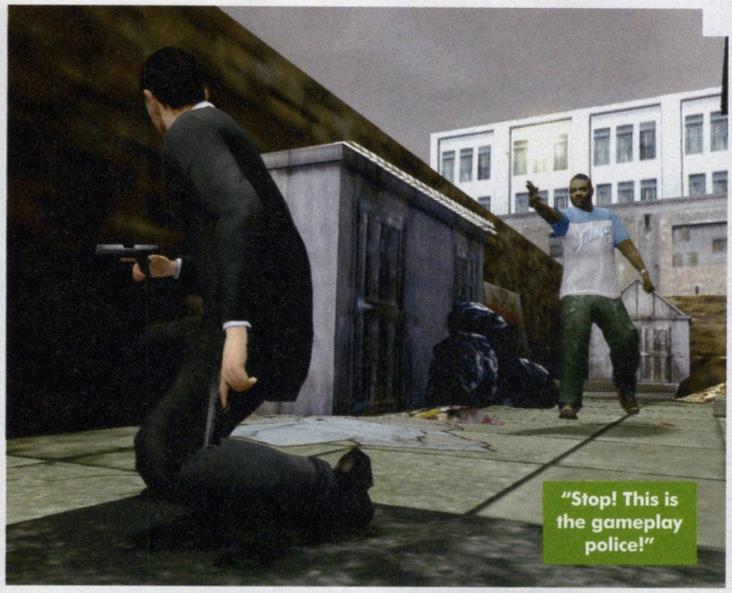
GENERALLY SLUGGISH

So... let's not beat around the bush: The Getaway is a remarkably dull game. It manages to fail on so many levels, it's hard to believe so much time and money was spent developing it. It seems the aim here was to be an "interactive movie" by having no indicators on the screen for health, ammo and the like, but the concept fails miserably. For instance, there is no manual camera control, no map, and no targeting crosshair. The attempt to strip away the "gameness" and immerse the player as if they were taking part in the latest Guy Ritchie movie, just results in frustration and at times even boredom.

To begin with, there are an incredible number of control and camera problems in this game. Your character's slow turning speed, mixed with the lack of a manual camera control means that you're regularly fighting with your own controls – usually in the crucial moments of a shoot-out. Control overall is generally sluggish, and the way you target enemies is prone to buggy moments where you seem to still be shooting at dead bodies rather than being able to select the next threat. The way to tell you are injured is by the blood splats on your clothes and the way your character begins to limp. The way around this is to heal by leaning up against walls, which means you have to spend half your time hiding and waiting around for yourself to heal when you're meant to be out there experiencing action. This makes the game very stop/start, and as a result, irritating.

But you get used to this feeling. There's even a mission in which you drive around for 10 minutes and then your objective becomes to essentially hide during a big battle and wait for it to be over. There's even a "stealth" mission requiring you to sneak to an office that pits the player against a bunch of brain-dead guards standing around with their backs to you. How thrilling.

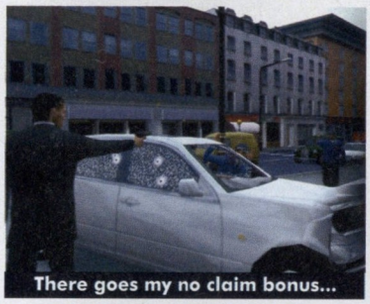
Other control issues seem to arise when attempting to pull of a variety of moves such as putting an enemy in a headlock – you'll find that turning and walking seem to become "broken" when doing this. You can't even get your character to walk up a small set of stairs with someone in a headlock, and yet there's no decent reason why this isn't possible. The game strives for realism, and yet there are so many illogical elements to the gameplay that the result is just an arbitrary mess of what you can do and what



"Stop! This is the gameplay police!"

Leave my garbage alone, you!

You dirty plant killer!



There goes my no claim bonus...

I'm *ugh* having so much *argh* fun.

Mark fails his parking exam.

Right, where's Team Soho's office...

You'll find there's as much of this dull gangster babble... **as there is a lack of gameplay.**

you can't. For instance, there's a mission where you need to find a gun in a police station – you can snap the necks of countless policemen who wave pistols at you, and yet their guns mysteriously vaporise when the bodies hit the floor, forcing you to continue lumbering around the hallways looking for the "correct" gun. Once you're armed though, fallen policemen's guns can be taken.

TERMINALLY DULL

Next are the relentless driving sections. Without fail, every mission requires you to drive from one location in London to another. Yes, London has been very faithfully recreated, and it's all very impressive in size, but that doesn't make up for the fact that driving from one location to another can be seriously annoying. The only way to know which way you're meant to be going is by observing your car's indicators. But as a navigational tool, it's terribly implemented. On occasions you'll reach a T-junction and there will be no indicator. Other times, it will flash to turn right but there will be no right turn for a good few minutes, and then when there is one, it's a dead-end. Why not just give the player a map? To make matters even worse, there's no rear-view whilst driving a car so you can't see what's happening behind you. Strange, considering most of your time is spent in car chases when you REALLY need to know who's behind you and where they are. We don't even have the space to detail the absolutely hopeless AI.

Then come the terminally dull cut-scenes. You'll be sitting through endless mobile phone calls in almost every single cutscene... watching people talk on the phone is just not interesting. If the script and "acting" were up to scratch, then maybe the game could get away with these tediously long cutscenes, but unfortunately this is nowhere near the quality of an episode of Blue Heelers, let alone a piece of cinema. Unfortunately, Team Soho want you to believe it is one, and you'll find there's as much of this dull gangster babble and gratuitous swearing as there is a lack of interesting gameplay.

!!! Vice City is by far the more fun of these two "drive around and shoot people" games...

Overall, it appears that Team Soho got so carried away with mapping London and making a piece of faux cinema that they forgot to make the Getaway a fun, playable and functional game. As your own character shouts at the beginning of one mission: "This is f**king ridiculous!", and indeed that's what it is. <<

PLUS: Decent soundtrack. Good driving physics.

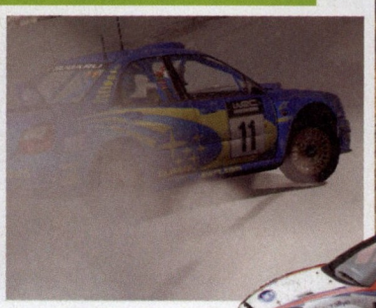
MINUS: Repetitive gameplay. Bad controls. Bad camera.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	85	56

OVERALL

59

Proof that more realism in games is not the way to go.



»PS2

WRC II Extreme

CATEGORY: Rally >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** SCEE >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE slams into top gear.

For a fairly niche sport, rally games are becoming terribly popular, particularly on the PlayStation 2. The consistent yet unspectacular quality of recent titles such as V-Rally 3, Colin McRae 3 and now WRC II Extreme means that a casual gamer, once brought up on the brief Sega Rally arcade taster or a pioneering amateurish PC rally title, faces a difficult choice when deciding how to quench their powersliding thirst.

VISTA SWEEPING

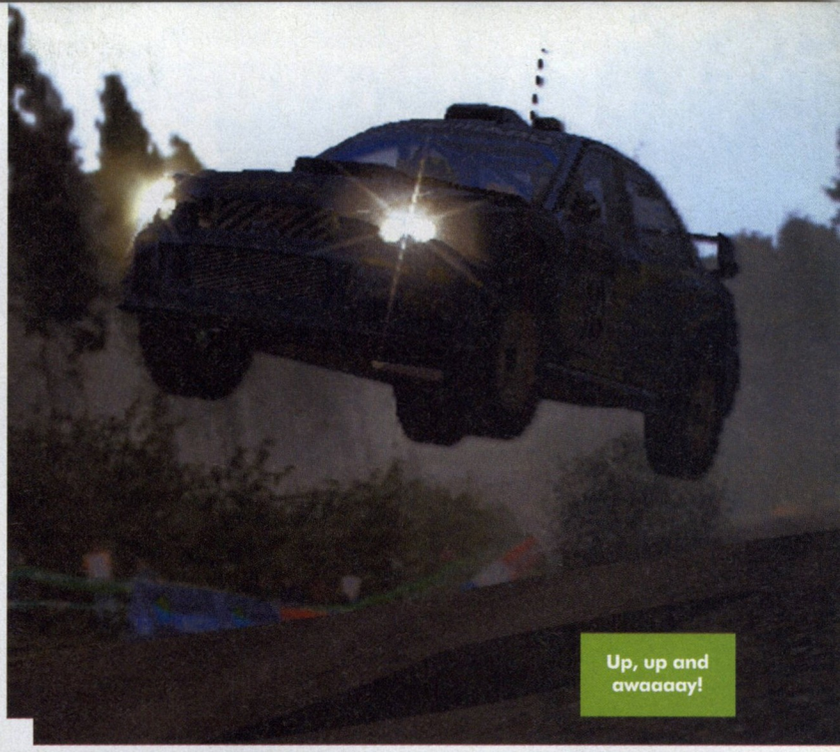
This, indirectly, is perhaps the reason that fervent followers of the World Rally Championship are entitled to be offended. Remember the day when an exclusive lucrative global premiere sporting license was enough to make a game stand out on store shelves? No...? Well ask your grandfather. Now, with the entrance of WRC II 'Extreme', you can throw any notion of good-old respect out the window. The once-noble WRC has been radicalised — it's in-your-face, intense, maximum action. Supposedly, if you're not living on the edge you're simply taking up too much space. Extreme? Whatever...

But a game is a game is a game. Ridiculous label or not, WRC II Extreme is a worthy addition to the PS2's impressively weighty rally line-up. Its predecessor, the original WRC, offered barrier-less, far-reaching environments, and effective use of a desirable license. Its driving model was consistent and straightforward, but could not avoid deadening even the keenest rally fan's enthusiasm.

Thankfully, WRC II Extreme improves considerably on the original. From the sharper environments and cars, to the capable weather effects (that aren't quite up to Colin 3's standards), WRC II appears accomplished. Its trademark sweeping vistas are present, and although certain stages such as Corsica feature some blob-texture hills in relatively close proximity to the course, most of the stages will impress with their varied and expansive topography.

The cars are nothing we haven't seen, but remain impressive. The sound, likewise, is sufficient, with appropriate if robotic pace notes and effects. The game's Chemical Brothers soundtrack could also prove to be quite an attractive addition for many gamers. Inter-stage damage repair management, a key component missing from Colin McRae 3, is also a welcome feature, as is the elementary yet appreciated car tinkering options, giving owners at least some depth within which to explore.

There are disappointments, however, that prevent the game from offering the experience for which rally fans might have hoped. Our appetite for a career mode, whetted by V-Rally 3's arrival so many moons ago, has not been fulfilled by WRC II. Whether legal obstacles prevent developers such as Evolution Studios from offering a realistic long-term recreation of the WRC merry-go-round, or it is pure



I really need a hands-free phone...

"Hey, the steering wheel came off."

"We're on a road to nowhere..."

"Are we there yet? Are we there yet?"

Lost in a mid-stage trance, **you'll wish blinking was optional.**

laziness on the behalf of these same programmers, the plain, well-trodden, difficulty-categorised season 'modes' that WRC II offers can no longer hold the attention of the eager gamer. There may be customisable championships, one to four player multiplayer 'hot-seat' seasons (arguably the game's best feature), an online challenge mode, and some unlockable dream cars, but Hyper just wants some career-based escapism.

LICENSE LOVING

The game's dynamics, when placed under the microscope, also lack precision in their recreation. The excessively robust car model and the damage's minimal effects on handling will disappoint many. Flying off a Monte Carlo cliff, landing heavily, and then tumbling down another embankment, only for you to retain not only your consciousness, but also both your front and back fenders, is wholly inappropriate for a game based on a sport involving survival and risk as prominent motifs. Also, handling simplifications, such as the ability to steer the car while in a slide, will upset the more discerning drivers. This lack of complexity also means that the game's learning phases are few and lacking in reward.

Yet, the chance to drive as every current WRC driver (apart from Codemasters' flag bearer Colin McRae) in each WRC car, from king 206 to the lumbering Skoda, through a half-dozen 'real' stages in the WRC's rally locations, most of which generally retain their real-world flavour, grandeur and variety, all framed nicely by an interface based around Chrysalis' WRC coverage, means that WRC II offers, at the very least, a superficially authentic experience. Although the game's simplistic handling might displease some, there is no denying that WRC II provides an intense challenge through stages lasting longer than five minutes. Lost in a mid-stage trance, you'll wish blinking was optional.

WRC II improves the original across the board, but most importantly in the area of speed. Realistic or not, the game will challenge your reflexes and concentration limits; at the same time continually reinforcing that you are playing the WRC. Although lacking a career mode, and a more involving driving model, WRC II Extreme could well be your rally solution. Hardly extreme, but definitely WRC. <<

!!! V8 Supercars Race Driver is coming to Xbox and PC this year!

PLUS: Splendid all-round presentation.

MINUS: Simplistic handling, no career mode.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	82	80

OVERALL

82

Extreme? No. Solid? Yes.

»PS2 GCN XBOX PC

NBA Live 2003

CATEGORY: Sports >> **PLAYERS:** 1-8 >> **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now

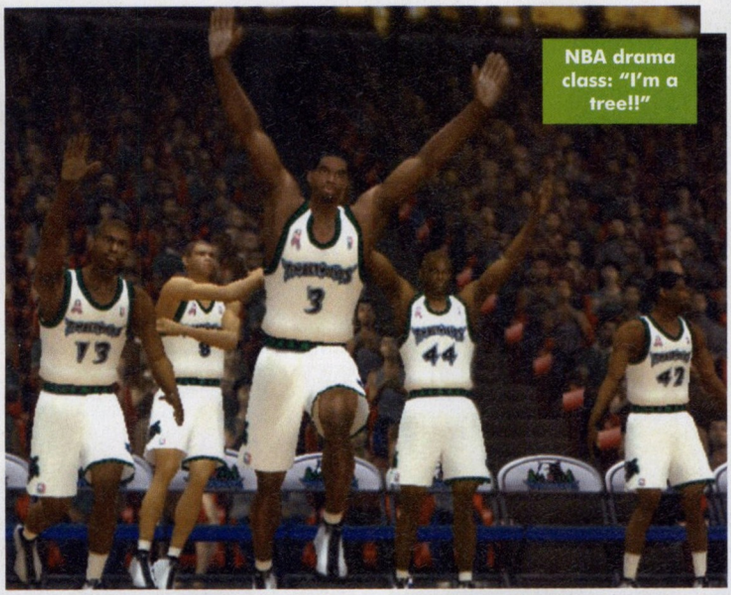
MICHAEL GRIESSER says "gimme the rock!"

EA is back with another yearly instalment, NBA Live 2003. This time it features the new freestyle control, which changes the game noticeably. EA in their latest range of sports games have provided some great presentation and cool effects and Live definitely showcases this. Does it have game though?

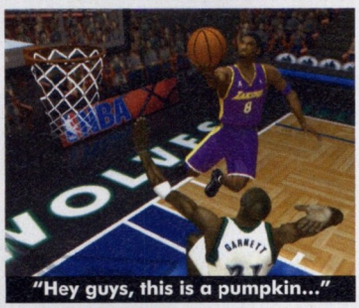
HEAD AND SHOULDERS

Graphically, Live is head and shoulders above last year's version. Players look more accurate with details such as cornrows on Allen Iverson to Ben Wallace's afro. There's a ton of different player characteristics such as headbands, tattoos, long socks and even the teams' old uniforms. Animations are silky smooth such as the crossover dribble, to dunking with players hanging on the rim. Small touches such as the backboard shaking after a big dunk, players on the bench jumping around like fools and coaches getting mad at refs add to the atmosphere of the game. The actual coaches of the teams are included and you'll see them walking up and down the court which is another nice inclusion. The action runs non-stop in Live 2003 and there's barely any slowdown, just fast, furious action. After big plays, players will flex their muscles or punch the air. Some of the replays are jaw dropping, such as the alley-oop, which is shown in slow motion. At the free throw line, the crowd even waves white foam sticks in the air trying to put you off. Graphically, NBA Live 2003 is definitely pro material.

When it comes to the sound, EA have included the necessary features again. This time around the commentary is diverse with both commentators responding to each other's comments more often. Player chatting can be heard frequently whether it's calling plays or talking trash. The crowd gets into the game, cheering loud after a basket is made or booing when a foul is called against the home team. Chants of defence are heard and dance music is played, just the stuff you'd hear in a real basketball game. Another nice touch is when the shot clock


NBA drama class: "I'm a tree!!"

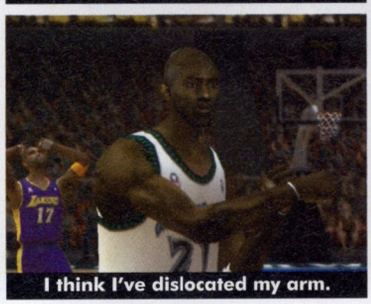
A karate chop to the neck will do nicely.


"Hey guys, this is a pumpkin..."

NBA: Natural Black Athletes

"Ball? What ball?"

He's on fire! Call 000!


I think I've dislocated my arm.

Another frustrating factor is that it's almost **impossible to block the opposition's dunks or layups.**

runs down, a heartbeat sound "thumps" telling you the pressure's on to get the shot off.

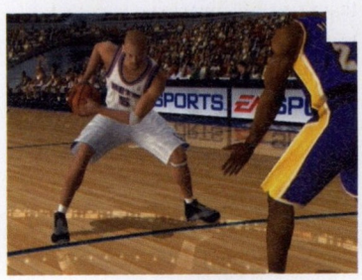
BLOCKS AND DUNKS

The graphics and sound in Live are quite good, but unfortunately, the game doesn't quite back it up. The tempo of the game in Live is fast with tons of blocks and dunks, meaning you have ridiculously high scoring games and obtain most of these points on fastbreak dunks. The new freestyle control means by moving the right analogue stick in certain directions you can perform new moves. For example on offence by moving the right analogue stick right your player will perform a crossover dribble to the right. Or on defence moving the right analogue stick right means your player will attempt to go for a steal with your right hand. One of the better moves with the freestyle control is the hesitation dribble where you move the right analogue stick left and then right (or vice versa). Blowing past the opposition with this happens often if used with the right player, just don't try it with Shaq. There is a tutorial which explains some of the freestyle moves, however, being able to actually practice these with a coach would have made this more valuable. Another frustrating factor is that it's almost impossible to block the opposition's dunks or layups.

It's not all bad news though, if you want a fast game to play with some friends then Live is great, the big dunks and blocks will have you cussing with your friends in no time. The low post game has also been improved, you can actually bang the ball inside feeling you have control of your player. This is a fastbreak, run and gun style of game.

Purists will be put off by the unrealistic nature of the game, yet casual fans may dig the fast and frantic action. Overall, Live just doesn't reach the top grade and now that NBA 2K3 is getting a PAL conversion, Live should be looking over its shoulder. <<

!!! We want NBA2k3!



REVIEWED ON:

PLUS: Innovative new freestyle control, fun at first...

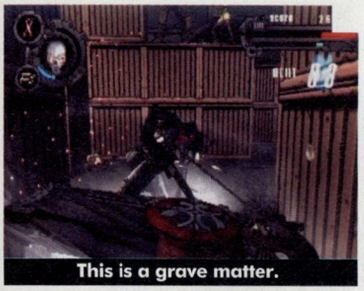
MINUS: ...but not for long. Too fast for a realistic game.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	81	75

OVERALL

77

Lots of flash and hype, but little substance.

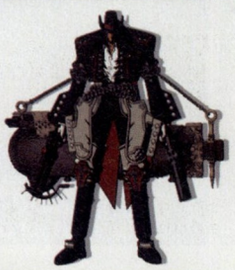

This is a grave matter.

Rage in the bank queue.

Pure BLAU gameplay.

>>PS2

Gungrave



CATEGORY: Shoot-em-up >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Activision >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

MALCOLM CAMPBELL is searching for the perfect Beat.

In these times of cross-genre games that include every play mode plus an unlockable kitchen sink, it's quite strange to find a game that sticks to one simple thing, and does it well. Gungrave makes no apologies for its back-to-basics gameplay, and initially looks like no more than a slick but repetitive vehicle for some excellent cut-scenes.

WE NEED GUNS. LOTS OF GUNS

Anime fans will most likely be familiar with the work of Gungrave's creator and character designer, Yasuhiro Nightow. His 'space western' manga, Trigun, was turned into an animated series, its popularity due in no small part to its stylish characters and abundance of guns. Big guns. Mr. Nightow seems to know his strengths, because Gungrave is all about shootings things with big guns and looking stylish doing it.

The story, told through some anime cut-scenes of the highest quality, follows Grave, an enigmatic lad who is entrusted with a massive pair of pistols called Cerberos. With these (and the rather large rocket-launching coffin Grave carries around) he must take down The Syndicate, an organisation that Grave was once affiliated with. Not exactly gripping stuff, but when it looks this pretty who cares.

The cel shaded in-game graphics emulate 2D art well. The muted colours and gritty industrial environs add to the moodiness, while the character design and animation give that real 'playing an anime' feel. Whether or not the limited draw distance and slowdown is intentional, is debatable, as both could be seen as conscious design decisions. Gungrave is no slouch in the sound department either – the constant booming gunshot and tinkling of empty shells hitting concrete form a surreally percussive accompaniment to the varied soundtrack.

!!! One of the unlockable extras is an awesome 3D model gallery.

BLOCK ROCKIN' BEATS

The actual game part of this package is its achilles heel. Gungrave doesn't play badly, it's just so simplistic and repetitive. Travelling through completely linear levels, Grave must shoot everything that stands against him. That's about it. Hitting targets and certain parts of the environment without missing a "Beat" will chain combos, enabling the use of special moves and counting toward the end of level ranking. Skillfully and stylishly racking up these Beat combos at the core of getting the most out of the game. Hitting that elusive 400+ Beat combo and getting the best end of game grade will keep the hardcore playing hours after most will have switched off. The fact that Gungrave is designed for multiple replays only just excuses its short length.

This return to the basics of shoot-em-up principles has its merits, but to have been a great game Gungrave needed much more. Where are the extra weapons? How about a bit of level exploration and discovery? And sure it's a shooter, but couldn't we have just a little variety in the two hours before the end credits roll?

Gungrave will appeal to a few. Anime and old-school shooter fans might do well to check it out, but others shouldn't expect more than a couple of hours of mindless fun. <<

PLUS: Fantastic visuals, sound and design. Slick and stylish.

MINUS: Simplistic, repetitive and very short.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	86	68

OVERALL

78

Heaps of style, not much substance.

Die the Tasmanian Tiger?

These 'rangs are stuck in my butt.

You're just in time for my BBQ...

>>PS2

Ty the Tasmanian Tiger

CATEGORY: Platformer/Adventure >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

BRETT ROBINSON puts some sun cream on his nose.

Raised by a family of Bilbies, Ty is a young Thylacine (Tassie Tiger to the rest of us) who reckons he's the last of his kind. Being a glass-is-half-full kind of bloke, however, Ty makes the most of his bleak situation and gets on with life, secretly hoping to one day stumble across another member of his species. What he eventually stumbles across is the legendary Bunyip Elder – an ancient spirit who fills Ty in on the dire situation at hand...

DOWNRIGHT HILARIOUS

Taking a look at the screenshots, it'd be easy to conclude that Ty the Tasmanian Tiger is merely a generic platformer overflowing with Australian stereotypes. But, while the game does pack more Aussie slang into its 15 levels than anyone could cram into 50 Crocodile Dundee movies, Ty actually has a lot more in common with the stellar Jak & Daxter, and even succeeds in improving on Naughty Dog's benchmark title.

From the outset, it's clear that developer Krome has nailed the presentation and storytelling aspects of the game; the rendered cut scenes that serve to advance the plot are crisp and action-packed, and the in-game graphics are superb. Ty's hub region, Rainbow Cliffs, and the levels and sub-levels that comprise the game proper are all gloriously detailed, with the lush rainforest and sun-drenched Barrier Reef environments deserving a special mention.

An army of adversaries – including thuggish Blue Tongues, hungry Saltwater Crocs and cranky Kangaroos – stand between Ty and the Talismans he so desperately seeks. Fortunately, Ty will have plenty of help along the way. All told, there are around 50 characters Ty will cross paths with, including his friend and mentor, Maurie; his girlfriend, Shazza(!); and the requisite tech guy, Julius. Thanks to the well-crafted dialogue and talented voice acting, the characters are truly a game highlight, and the advice and anecdotes they dispense are often downright hilarious.

!!! Check out the DVD section for our Steve Irwin review!

THE NAKED EYE

When it comes to moves, Ty isn't exactly defenceless, but it's his sizeable arsenal of boomerangs that really makes him a force to be reckoned with. There are 13 'rang types to be collected, and most serve multiple purposes. For example, the Aquarangs are useful for taking out aquatic beasties, but they also allow Ty to glide through the water at great speed. His Frostyrang momentarily freezes enemies, and creates stepping stone-like icebergs when thrown into bodies of water (handy for cocktail parties, no doubt). And Ty even has an Infrarang (D&D geeks rejoice!) that allows him to see items normally invisible to the naked eye.

With hundreds of items to snap up on every level, completion freaks will be kept busy for quite some time, and the optional bonus races in every level increase Ty's longterm value somewhat. On the down side, though, most players will see the closing cinematic after only 10–15 hours of play. At least you'll have a really fun time getting there. <<

PLUS: Wicked boomerangs, hilarious dialogue and voice-acting.

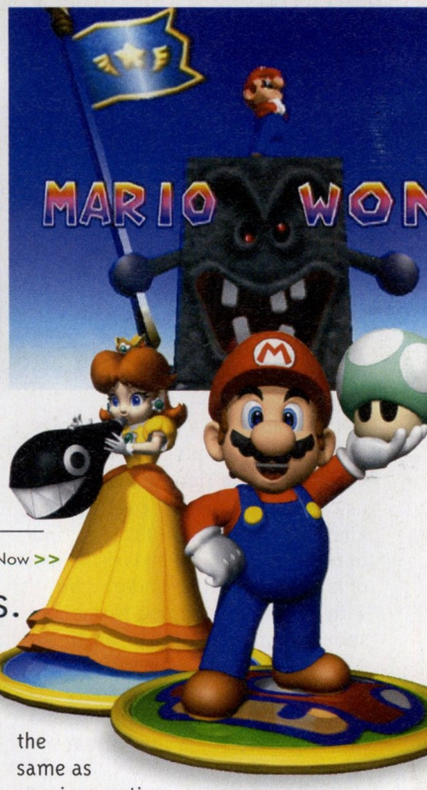
MINUS: A few more levels wouldn't have hurt.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	85	82

OVERALL

82

A bloody entertaining adventure game for gamers of all ages.



»GCN

Mario Party 4

CATEGORY: Party game >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo/Hudsonsoft >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

KOSTA ANDREADIS is the life of the party, as always.

On the Nintendo 64, the joint Hudson Soft/Nintendo production Mario Party proved to be a huge success all around the world. The idea was to take the board game experience and successfully translate it into the videogame world, hence a game that only shone when played with friends. The blend of numerous mini-games with a fully animated board spawned two sequels on the N64, which were essentially rehashes with only minor upgrades, but continued to sell extremely well. As a result the franchise became both equally loved and hated, and this Christmas the fourth instalment of the Mario Party franchise, called Mario Party 5, no wait Mario Party 4, is being released on Nintendo GameCube. Aside from obvious visual upgrades, Mario Party 4 is essentially more of the same, which probably won't win any new fans for the series nor disappoint its current fan base.

IT'S A PYJAMA JAMMY JAM!

The premise is rather simple. Instead of coming up with a convoluted storyline Nintendo have opted to treat the game as what it is, a Mario Party, where only the who's who of the Nintendo world can attend. The cast features the likes of Mario, Luigi, Yoshi, Peach, Daisy, Wario, Waluigi, and the primate's primate Donkey Kong. Mario Party 4 offers up three main modes of play, Party Mode, where up to four players can play, Story Mode, the single player version of the game, and Mini-Game mode, where you can play all the mini-games you've unlocked. Story Mode is the single player side of the game, and if you've ever played a game of Monopoly by yourself, you'll soon realise that words like "boring", "stupid" and the phrase "Sweet Zombie Jesus!" exist for a reason. Party Mode is where you want to be, so call up some friends, yell "Hey Ma! Get down from the dang roof", stock up on the finger foods and beverages, and prepare to party like its 19999 (the extra 9 is intentional).

With five all new boards to choose from, the game plays pretty much the same as previous outings, where players take turns to traverse a fully animated board in order to purchase Super Stars which are placed at random locations. Now if the game were merely this then it pretty much would have blown goats, but thankfully after each turn players engage in a random mini-game in order to collect much needed coins. Mario Party 4 offers 50 all-new mini-games ranging from free-for-all battles to tag team matches that for the most part will test your reflexes and basic motor skills. The mini-games vary considerably: Mario Medley has you

Players don't look quite as good as they did in Smash Bros... **but they are far from blocky.**

swimming using a variety of strokes, Avalanche has you fleeing and skiing down an icy mountain, and The Great Deflate has you teaming up to deflate a giant Thwomp. Unlike previous outings there are scarcely any duds amongst the new crowd, and the simplicity of the mini-games means that almost anyone can pick up a controller and have a go. The five boards themselves are themed using various Nintendo icons, from the mushroom inspired Toad's Midway Madness to the spooky Boo's Haunted Bash. Each board is varied enough to add new gameplay elements and even different degrees of difficulty. The animated nature of the boards, and the numerous items to collect, help ease the anticipation between mini-games, but ultimately they serve as a backdrop to the immense fun to be had when four players go head-to-head for coins and pride. At the end of each party, bonus stars are awarded based upon various performances and more often than not change the outcome considerably. Consequently, announcing the overall winner is a tense moment and keeps the high level of competition right up to the last second.

!!! It's still a better party game than Whacked or Fuzion Frenzy on the Xbox.

TIME TO LEAVE PEOPLE

The transition from Nintendo 64 to GameCube has done wonders for the game from a visual standpoint, with some impressive textures and effects seen in some mini-games. The water, lighting and transparency effects in particular are of a high standard. Players don't look quite as good as they did in Smash Bros, which is shame, but they are far from blocky and do animate quite well. The boards themselves have never looked better and with the improved hardware they are a lot more detailed and feature some impressive design. Characters are brought to life with numerous voice samples, with everything from tears of joy to harsh defeat all accounted for. In the music department, the franchise hasn't evolved at all and still remains colourful, light-hearted and altogether forgettable. When played with friends you'll barely notice the sound as you'll be too busy trying to trash talk over each other.

Mario Party 4 is a great multiplayer game, but one that is heavily flawed. A boring single player mode, lengthy games, and somewhat slow pacing hamper what could have been the quintessential party game. <<

PLUS: A blast with four-players.

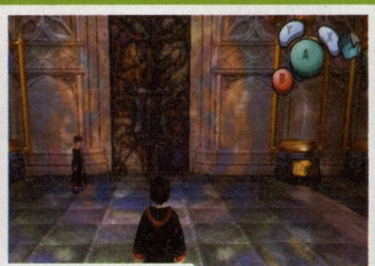
MINUS: Arse with one.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
71	62	68

OVERALL

69

Fourth instalment that fails to improve upon its predecessors.



»GCN XBOX PS2

Harry Potter & THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

CATEGORY: Adventure >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** EA >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now

CAM SHEA busts a kick-flipendo...

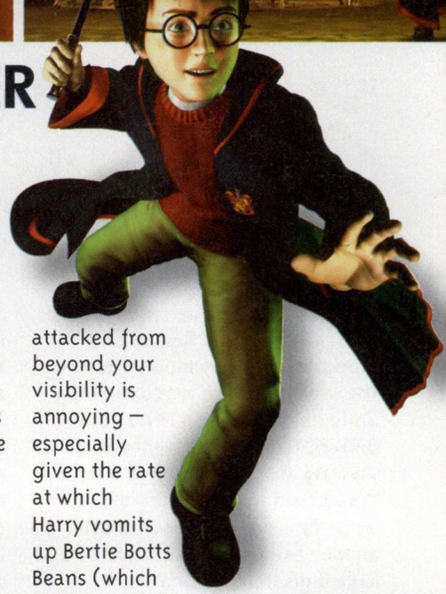
You've read the books, you've seen the films. What is there left to do for the die hard Harry Potter fan? You could get dressed up in robes, walk the streets waving a twig around and puzzle over those zany muggles, then jump into the nearest fireplace in hopes of reaching Diagon Alley. But that's not for everyone. The safer bet for an interactive Harry Potter experience is simply to pick up one of the games that have (magically!) materialised in time for the film's release.

VOMITING UP BERTIE BEANS

Eurocom are on development duties for the console versions, and they've done a reasonable job. Not a great one, but a reasonable one. The game is structured by the day, with Harry having certain objectives depending on what class he has or what events transpire. A nice touch is that even after you've completed all his tasks, you can still wander around for as long as you want, and choose to go to bed whenever you like (Harry's a big boy now). It might have been nice to have some secondary objectives to encourage people to use this time, but no matter.

Eurocom have obviously taken some liberties with the narrative in order to open up gameplay opportunities. For instance, you have to find Ginny Weasley's lost items in Diagon Alley (It's not a patch on Redfern's Urine Alley. Sigh.), rescue Ron from the Whomping Willow tree and complete puzzle sections to learn spells. However, opportunities are also lost along the way. Why not make a mini-game out of the drive to school? After all, it could be achieved with a reworking of the Quidditch mechanics.

Unfortunately, the narrative feels artificially crammed in-between the gameplay most of the time, creating a disjointed experience. The gameplay isn't anything to email home about, either. Push a crate here, "knock out" (there's no death) an enemy there. Fling a gnome here, risk dying of boredom there. Three spells can be assigned to the face buttons at any one time, which is a nice system (hi Zelda!). However, as cool as the spellcasting premise is, it winds up being pretty dull with the difficulty coming from a patchy lock-on system and sticky camera mechanics rather than design. The number of times you're attacked from beyond your visibility is annoying – especially given the rate at which Harry vomits up Bertie Botts Beans (which can be traded for all sorts of goodies) with every hit.



Eurocom have included some "stealth" sections along with the usual crate-pushing flipendo-unleashing gameplay. You have to sneak past hall monitors and the like, using Harry's ability to press up against walls and shimmy along. Unfortunately, you'll be struggling with the camera to such a degree

Hold on – is this Ape Escape?!

Harry goes looking for the strip clubs.

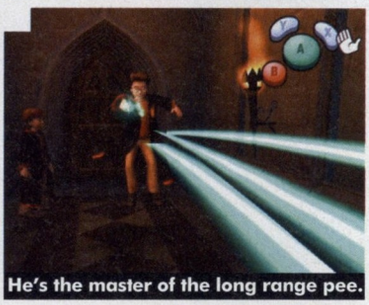
A LETTER TO EUROCOM

Dear Eurocom,

Sorry, but we managed to break your game. In Diagon Alley we climbed a ladder into an attic, then fell through the loose floorboards and back down to the lowest level where the crate that we'd just used to climb up had disappeared! Could this be the work of Dobby? Or just a glitch that you didn't pick up? Either way we were forced to restart at our last save point. This really isn't good enough for a retail release, but we'll let it go this time.

Yours sincerely,
The Hyper crew

Harry slips in a hip-flask of bourbon.



He's the master of the long range pee.

Harry steals more lunch money.

Harry Potter: Animal "lover".

QUIDDITCH.

>>The Quidditch mechanics haven't changed since the first title, and still leave us a little cold. All you're left to do is fly through a series of rings before getting close enough to the snitch to grab it. Attempting to do much more would have made these sections very complicated indeed, but we still feel that it's a pretty pedestrian interpretation of a very exciting concept, and more could have been done.

REVIEWED ON:

PLUS: Nice visuals, some very cool sections.

MINUS: Barely faithful to the property.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	79	72

OVERALL

78

A little run of the mill, but charming nonetheless.

Harry Potter fans will find **stacks of things to nitpick about** in this game.

that these really aren't much fun. The invisibility cloak sections in the original PSX game were better.

DOBBY COULD KICK JAR JAR'S ASS IN A FIGHT...

It's also a real shame that there is still no party system. Other characters simply stand around and you can talk to them, but you are never accompanied. Given the bond between the kids in the books this is a huge disappointment. Surely walking to class with Ron and Hermione wouldn't have been that hard.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets sports some nice visuals at times. Diagon Alley is nice and crooked, the fight against the Whomping Willow is pretty spooky, and flying around the truly massive castle grounds is also very well realised. Indeed, the recreation of Hogwarts will excite any HP fan. There are stacks of floors to explore, many with interlocking secret passages, and the feeling of being in a vast maze comes across well. The fact that many areas are full of locked doors dampens ones eagerness to explore though, as do the longish load times that pop up every second door you go through, but there are enough positives to keep you playing.

!!! TTC? Once the FMV is done, approximately 0-1 second.

That said, it's obvious that Eurocom didn't have access to much material from the film... and that they didn't pay too much attention to the book either. Harry Potter fans will find stacks of things to nitpick about in this game. Why is Mrs Weasley wearing normal muggle clothes? Why aren't any of the paintings and pictures in the game animated? Why isn't there a frozen student when Harry discovers the petrified Nearly Headless Nick? Why does the dueling lesson take place in a class? Why is it that after the other students discover Harry is a parselmouth that they'll still chat happily to him in the corridors... even though they're supposedly terrified that he's the scion of Slytherin. There are other annoyances too. We didn't expect the game to have the actual actors lending their voices, but it still won't stop you from getting annoyed with the delivery of dialogue. And if I hear the word flipendo one more time...

HP and the COS (as we affectionately call it here) is hardly the game that Harry Potter fans have been hanging out for. That said, it's a fun enough romp that is still a cut above most other licensed releases. <<

>>GCN XBOX PS2

X-Men: Next Dimension

CATEGORY: 3D Fighting >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** Activision >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

DANIEL WILKS persecutes Mutie scum...

Anyone familiar with comics or recent pop-culture in general will know who the X-Men are - not necessarily the characters themselves, but they will have heard of the superhero group. They will have some inkling that the X-Men are a group of mutants fighting to free their kind from persecution. Let it be known that mankind will never stop persecuting mutants so long as the games they appear in are poorly controlled, badly executed and so wildly unbalanced that they are nearly unplayable. As long as this is the case, mutant kind will never rest easy.

DREAM COME TRUE

Everything starts off so well with a well-animated FMV introducing the player to the violent and potentially deadly world of mutant kind. There's all type of gloss and glamour, but in reality the entire game is nothing but surface polish - when you dig any deeper you find hurried code, poor AI, terrible game balance, slow controls and a truly distracting camera. On the surface, however, everything looks grand - players can control one of 24 favourite comic characters (including a couple of unlockable ones), each with their own specific looks and powers (no Ken/Ryu likenesses here) and have instant access to a large number of game modes including Story, Arcade, Team Battle and Time Attack. If you're a fan of the X-Men or even comics in general it sounds like a dream come true.

The first look at the story mode does nothing to dispel this dream-like state - the story itself is enthralling, the FMV is generally good and the voice acting is top notch. It's just a pity that the actual fighting sequences are all but unplayable.

Out of all of the problems that plague X-Men: Next Dimension, the two that really ruin the experience are the terrible AI and distinct lack of balance between characters. There's only so many times you can be thoroughly trounced by the AI on easy level before you throw down the controller in disgust and walk away. Before anyone thinks that giving up on easy makes this reviewer a wuss, let me illustrate the point with a little anecdote; you sit down to play a game you've been looking forward to for a long time. You quickly skim through the manual to get familiar with the controls and decide to play Wolverine because he's described as being a fast character with good hand-to-hand attacks. You jump straight into the arcade mode, the AI chooses Cyclops (a medium strength, medium speed character) and you're away. Before the ready prompt has faded from the screen, Cyclops launches into an unblockable 36 hit combo that drains four fifths of your health, launches you across the screen and proceeds to whittle away the remainder of your health with eye beams. Not being one to give up, you try again, choosing Cyclops this time, thinking to yourself that you can win this time. The AI chooses Juggernaut,

Nightcrawler really needs to lose the boots.

Just dislodging a chicken bone, right?

Juggernaut didn't like his manicure.

The fart of death!

Cyclops gives his friends a free tan.

The next ballroom dancing champs.

Looks like he has him licked.

Any character can become a raging force of destruction, capable of **obliterating any character** you choose with ease.

the absolute slowest character in the game. You think you're in for an easy victory. Think again. In the hands of the AI, the terribly slow (to the point of being almost unplayable) Juggernaut can effortlessly pull off 10 or 15 hit combos time and time again, pummelling your character into the dust. In the hands of the AI, on any difficulty setting, any character can become a raging force of destruction, capable of obliterating any character you choose with ease. It's more than a little frustrating.

SIMPLE MASH FEST

X-Men: Next Dimension fares a little better as a multiplayer game - no matter how flawed the characters, there's always fun to be had beating up your friends, right? There's a decent amount of enjoyment in a simple mash fest, but it won't last long. It's okay for some characters to be grossly overpowered in a comic as it makes for exhilarating battles against favourite enemies, but in a game? A few of the characters: Cyclops, Phoenix, Toad, Havok and Magneto to name a few have powerful range attacks that can be accomplished by simply repeatedly mashing the A button on the controller, whilst others are so slow or inaccurate with their attacks that you'll find yourself trounced time and time again even when you master all of their special moves. It's a pity, because at its core, the X-Men: Next Dimension fighting engine is quite good – especially if you're a fan of long combos and juggles. A supposedly dynamic camera that often switches about so randomly that your attacks will go in the totally opposite direction from which you aimed doesn't help proceedings either.

!!! Looking forward to X-Men 2? It's out this year folks!

Although the textures don't take advantage of the processing power of the little cube that could, the animations are nice and fluid and deliver a great sense of character - each of the X-Men have their own individual entrance and victory scene that compliments their fighting style. It would have been nice to see some more animations per character but there's no real complaint there. Likewise the voice acting for each character is right on the money but once again there are too few sound bites and after a fight or two you've heard them all. Overall it seems like X-Men: Next Dimension was rushed for a Christmas release – it's a pity because with some tweaking and character balance it could have been quite good. <<

REVIEWED ON:

PLUS: Decent fighting engine and good selection of characters.

MINUS: Unbalanced characters, terrible AI, bad controls.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	78	50

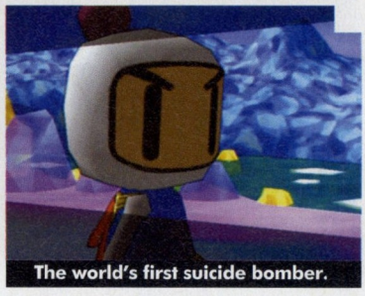
OVERALL

52

Needed a few more months of work...

He's still upset about his poodle hat.

Oh no, the pit of carkoon!


The world's first suicide bomber.

>>GCN

Bomberman Generation

CATEGORY: Battle >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** Hudsonsoft >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

KOSTA ANDREADIS always seems to be bombing out.

For many years now the Bomberman franchise has remained immensely popular when played with four players. The simplistic arcade controls, colourful visuals and straightforward design hasn't changed all that much over the years because Bomberman is all about having fun whilst trying to blow each other up. Bomberman Generation on GameCube is the latest instalment in the franchise, and one that attempts to provide a single player experience that is as solid as the multiplayer one.

CLASSIC 2D GAMING

There's a story involving bomb crystals, bomb bandits and even a bomb ship, but it's all quite ludicrous. You see, Bomberman has to set out and retrieve six bomb crystals before the Hige Hige Bandits get their paws on them, all with the help of a loony professor. There are six worlds to explore, each with multiple levels, and numerous boss battles. Instead of attempting to emulate other 3D adventure games like the last few Bomberman outings on the Nintendo 64, HudsonSoft have kept fairly linear with a clear emphasis on puzzle solving, fighting, and blowing up your surroundings. It's actually quite involving and a clear throwback to classic 2D gaming simply re-designed and re-packaged with a pseudo-3D look. The levels themselves start off quite simple in design and difficulty, but before long the puzzles and levels become quite complex.

There are numerous items and power ups to collect along the way, such as different bomb types, speed increases, and power ups, but the addition of Pokémon-style creatures called Charaboms, whilst awkward, work reasonably well. Each Charabom that Bomberman collects can provide him with various attributes ranging from full speed, larger throwing distances, to the ability to remotely detonate your bombs. As you come across new Charaboms on your journey, you'll have to do battle with them in order to acquire them. There are numerous items scattered across stages that allow you to upgrade your Charaboms and the ability to merge them also adds an extra element of strategy.

!!! Sadly there's no GBA link-up companion.

GO MAD

There's nothing technically impressive about the game but it does achieve what it sets out to do. The sound effects and character voices are pretty average but the midi music is repetitive to an annoying degree and without an option to turn it down some gamers are likely to go mad. The cel-shading and character designs are fairly well done though.

Multiplayer is where the series has always shined and the four-player head-to-head battle modes of Generation are a lot of fun. With eight different arenas and five different battle modes available, fans of the series will definitely be satisfied. Players can fully customise each match with the time, level and number of rounds all adjustable. The variety of the multiplayer modes is commendable and coupled with a solid single player experience, Bomberman Generation is the best instalment the franchise has seen in a long while. it's still not as good as Bomberman of old, but it's getting closer. <<

PLUS: Simple, addictive, explosive. Bomberman is back!

MINUS: Short and sweet single player mode.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
72	60	82

OVERALL

80

The Bomberman series manages to save a little face.

He sees dead people.

Unbreakable crates! Tragedy!

Cam loses it on deadline.

Die Hard: Vendetta

CATEGORY: FPS >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Sierra >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** M >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

CAM SHEA is a die hard *Die Hard* fan...

Everyone loves *Die Hard*. It's a fact. For such an old film series, the *Die Hard* license still has amazing pulling power... as does John "spunk-master" McLane. Woof. Perhaps this is due to just how cool the first film was. *Die Hard* was a gritty, funny, well-crafted action film that touched all the right buttons. As a license, these films are perfect for videogame adaptations. Unfortunately, developers Bits Studios haven't exactly made the most of that potential.

SHOOT THE CIVILIAN

The problems begin at the very start of the game. In the first couple of levels you're presented with a number of hostage situations, where a terrorist is holding a civilian. Accidentally shoot the civilian and you're back to the start. Wait too long while aiming, however, and the terrorist will shoot him for you. The way around this is to leave auto-aim on (yes, it is the default), but this is so ridiculously exaggerated that you can simply run through the entire game firing madly in every direction wiping out the bad guys before you even see them. This illustrates everything that's wrong with this game – one setting is unforgiving, the other is way too easy, and they both feel messy.

One element that we do like about *Die Hard* Vendetta is the ability to grab enemies from behind to interrogate them, use them as a human shield or put your gun to their head and force any bad guys nearby to drop their weapons and get down on the floor. It's a nice touch that makes the game feel a little more expansive than it might otherwise have, but ultimately isn't reliable enough to become a proper tactic.

MR MARBLES?

Indeed, it's hard to know what approach the developers want gamers to take to get through this game. On one hand you can take hostages and lean out from corners to take aim. On the other, there are so many trial and error situations where you end up shooting a hostage or failing a mission that you simply aren't rewarded for taking a cautious approach, and certainly lose interest in it after being forced to repeat the same mission several times through no real fault of your own. This is especially galling given the exceptionally primitive AI sported by the terrorists. These guys are stupid, but we have a theory that this is because they're all inbred.

!!! TTS (Time To Swearing) in this game is a matter of seconds.

You see, across a single *Die Hard* level, you'll generally only see two or three different enemy models. Not only is this unacceptably lazy on the part of the developers, but shooting up a room full of identical enemy drones is freaky. The character models are weird too – dirty low-res textures, dead eyes and bizarre mouths make the other characters look like evil puppets. And there's nothing scarier than evil puppets.

Die Hard Vendetta isn't all bad. At times the run and gun gameplay is quite entertaining, and the amount of NPC dialogue in the game is cool, but the bottom line is that in such a packed market, a title like this doesn't deserve to succeed. <<

PLUS: The dad from Family Matters.

MINUS: No Urkle.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	75	64

OVERALL

65

Die Hard Vendetta is a mess, best to give it a wide birth.

»PC

Arx Fatalis

CATEGORY: First Person RPG >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** JoWood >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 3D card

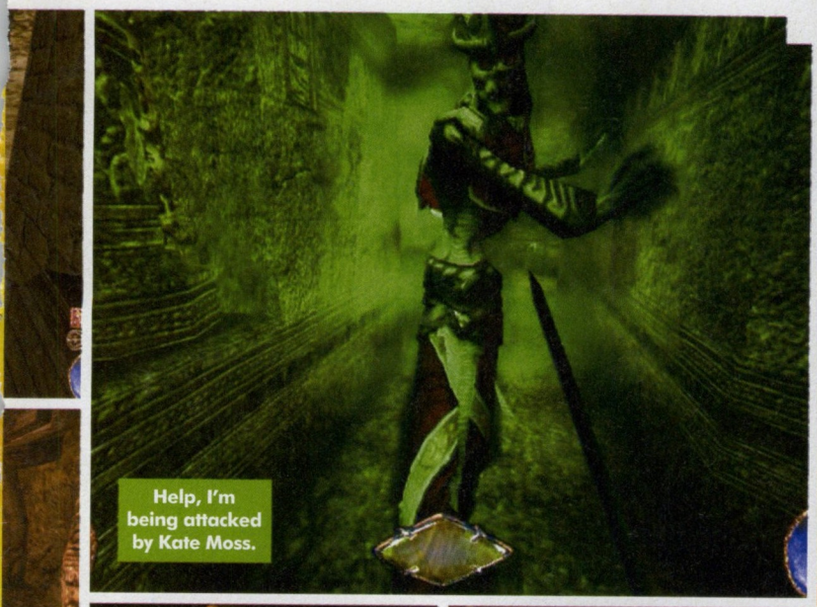
ELIOT FISH goes in search of the evil Admiral.

Post Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind, it's hard to know whether anyone will have the stamina for another in-depth first-person RPG. However, it may just peak your interest to know that Arkane Studios have quite openly stated that they wanted to bring to life a new 3D RPG in the vein of Ultima Underworld, an undisputed classic. The result is that Arx Fatalis is a far more focused and traditional RPG than Morrowind that comes close to fulfilling Arkane Studios' lofty promise. Start stocking the fridge.

FEELS CLUMSY AT FIRST

Arx Fatalis is set entirely in the caves and dungeons of the underground, as the surface world has been plunged into darkness. Arx itself is a small town set inside a big cave system where houses have been built and ventilation shafts bring in fresh air from the surface. Humans try to go about their business whilst dealing with interference from Goblins, Trolls, Orcs, rat-men and the emergence of an evil cult that is trying to conjure forth the evil demon, Akbaa (yes, the Admiral is coming!). You learn all of this after beginning the game in a prison cell where you awaken with no memory of who you are – but there's a good reason for your predicament that you will discover later. Breaking out of the cell acts as a small tutorial for players to get the hang of the control system. It's very Ultima in style – there are two mouse modes, one for movement and one for interactivity – with a small hand icon that can double click on things to use, and highlight objects for information. Like most first-person games, you can jump, crouch, sneak and go in and out of combat mode with the press of a button. It's all pretty standard stuff.

What is quite different however is the magic system – it is rune based, and spells must be drawn out on screen much like the spell-casting in Black & White. It feels clumsy at first, and you'll wonder why it is so hard for the game to recognise the simple patterns, but you need to remember that your character is inexperienced. The ease and success of your spellcasting will improve if you choose to spend stat points on your magic skills as you level up. We must say, however, that it's this spell system which is probably the game's weakest component. In the thick of battle, it becomes quite stressful not only remembering the rune combinations, but finding time to cast the spells before you get hacked to pieces. To help you, the game allows you to pre-cast up to three spells which are then bound to hot keys. This helps a little bit, but it just isn't enough, and it remains a lot easier to get through combat with good old melee attacks. It simply seems too difficult to be a magic-user alone in Arx Fatalis.



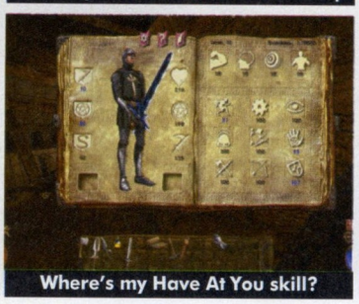
Help, I'm being attacked by Kate Moss.

You dirty rat, yooou.

His last job was the Thriller videoclip.

Hadoken!

Lord Seafood impresses with his zippo tricks.



Where's my Have At You skill?

Go on, pull my finger.

COOK FISH ON A FIRE

Melee combat, then, plays out much like Morrowind and other 3D RPGs. You simply click the mouse to swing your sword, and the longer you hold the click in, the more strength will go into the swing of your weapon. You can also use range weapons for picking off enemies from a distance. It all works well enough, but it's no different to the 3D RPG systems we've been using for years. Someone really needs to re-invent 3D RPG combat.

The world of Arx is great, and the game is loaded with atmosphere and character. The sound, for one, is extremely well orchestrated, with howling wind coming through the vents, the clank of your armour as you walk and the various spooky off-screen noises that really set the scene. The game also looks incredibly pretty at times, even though it's quite a basic 3D engine. It all performs quite well on lower spec machines too, which is nice.

The world is fun to explore, and rather than inundate the player with sub-quests, the plot proceeds in quite a linear fashion. In this case, it works well and is very enjoyable to play and explore. Naturally, you do receive multiple missions, but it's always very clear as to what you should perhaps try next, as opposed to days of confused wandering in Morrowind.

> The world is fun to explore, and rather than inundate the player with sub-quests, the **plot proceeds in quite a linear fashion**

!!! The game comes with a cool bonus disc of wallpapers, a screensaver and other Arxy things.

The interactivity with the world is fun, and like Ultima, you can do crazy things like cook fish on a fire, or even combine flour and water to make dough and then cook it to make bread. You can grind flora to make potions, if you have the skills, and the technical and intuition skills work nicely. Rather than have any kind of character class or race system, you play a particular character who is multi-skilled, and it's basically up to you to mould your character from the skill points you can distribute as you play. Every player can become a strong, beefy warrior with magic skills and the ability to pick locks – and it feels that the general idea is to get good at everything, because you'll need the ability at some stage.

With some really nicely designed puzzles and a well written mystery to solve, Arx Fatalis is a thoroughly enjoyable and atmospheric RPG experience that is a nice journey back into the headspace of RPG games of old. An intelligent RPG, and recommended. <<

PLUS: Focused plot and mission structure, fun world interactivity.

MINUS: Clumsy magic system, clipping problems, bugs.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	89	84

OVERALL

83

A guaranteed good time for serious RPG lovers.

>>PC

Robin Hood: THE LEGEND OF SHERWOOD

CATEGORY: Strategy/Puzzle >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Strategy First >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** PII 233, 64MB RAM

FRANK DRY takes a closer look at his little john.

Were you a Desperado? Spellbound Studios would certainly hope that you were, as their strategy game from about a year ago, Desperados, has paved the way for the men in tights – Robin Hood and his band of merry men. Now you can be a desperado who has a fetish for green stockings. Feel like joining up?

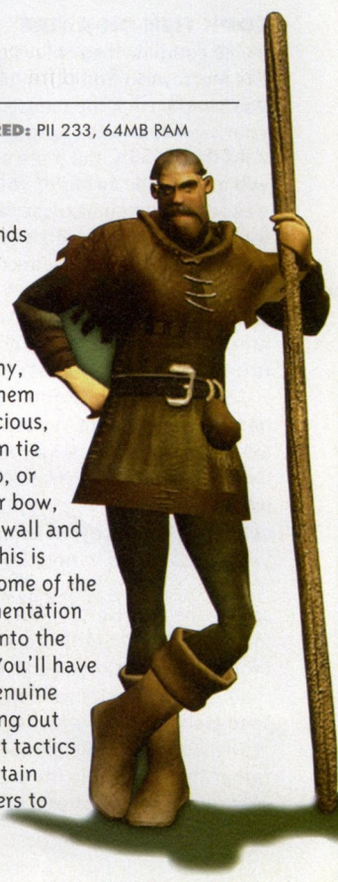
SUCK YOU IN

With a lush and detailed 2D engine, Robin Hood is a surprising game. It's the kind of game that sits in the shadows of other bigger PC releases (especially over Christmas), doing its best to somehow get noticed up there at the back of the shelf. If you do happen to take a chance on it, you'll discover a really fun and challenging puzzle-type strategy game that echoes the brilliant Commandos, and of course the aforementioned Desperados: Wanted Dead or Alive.

Your band of merry men are a selection of tools, essentially, and we don't mean that they're a bunch of dickheads. They're tools that the player can use to unlock the devilsh puzzles and conquer the scenarios that the game presents them with. There are a variety of ways to go about things, and it comes down to the player's ability to figure out how and when to use certain characters to achieve succcess. Unlike Desperados, Robin Hood allows a far greater degree of flexibility, and there are sometimes many different ways of approaching a mission, depending on which members of the merry men are available to you.

Little John is a total powerhouse, who is great for assaulting the enemy; Friar Tuck is nimble like a thief and can gag people; Maid Marian can cure all ills; and of course Robin is a great archer. Characters have some cool animations too, and the unique fighting system that allows you to dictate how certain characters flick their swords about makes for some really entertaining duels. It's especially cool how you can use your environment during a fight. Small details like this really help to suck you in and you'll want to devote your time to progressing through the game.

Passing the mouse across the screen will give you access to a variety of easy to understand action icons, giving you access to commands for your "units" such as attack an enemy, knock them unconscious, and then tie them up, or use your bow, climb a wall and so on. This is where some of the experimentation creeps into the game. You'll have some genuine fun trying out different tactics with certain characters to



Look out men, it's an ambush of Ents!

Friar Tuck is dealing in "herbs" again.

Rob the rich and, er, kill the rich...

These Sydney bushfires are bad.

The latest Hyper HQ renovations.

The merry men spend a night together.

Let's stop for a quick drumstick.

see what is the most effective way of getting past some guards or stealing a pile of gold from under their noses.

ROB THE RICH

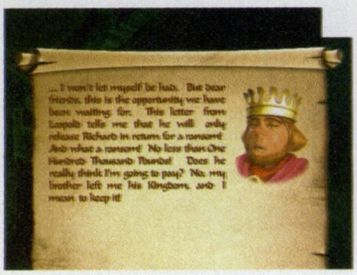
You can choose to tackle some missions depending on their difficulty, and you'll even have time between missions to work on gathering necessary resources for upcoming tasks, such as making arrows or collecting healing herbs. The story closely follows the famous Robin Hood tale – the Sheriff of Nottingham is the bad guy, and you as Robin get to rob the rich to feed the poor and so on. You'll also be wanting to find a way to get King Richard out of gaol where he has been wrongfully imprisioned. Progression is well paced, and we can imagine most gamers of varying ability would be able to get through Robin Hood without having to bang their head on the keyboard too many times.

The visuals are highly detailed, and whilst only 2D and quite pixelised at the closest zoom, they have a charm that is uniquely their own. Anyone who's played Stronghold or the Commandos games will attest to the appealing nature of such a simple 2D engine. Even so, the minimum specs on the box are a bit out of touch, and you'll certainly need more than a PII 233 to play the game comfortably at a high resolution. You'll want a PIII 733 at least for 1024X768.

Overall, Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood is a highly entertaining puzzle/strategy game that will delight anyone who loves these kinds of games. If you appreciate puzzle-solving mixed with a degree of tactical combat, then Robin Hood could very well be the man... er, game for you. <<

Your band of merry men are a selection of tools, and we don't mean that they're a bunch of dickheads.

!!! www.nottinghamshire tourism.co.uk/themes/robinhood


... I won't let myself be had. But bear friends, this is the opportunity we have been waiting for. This letter from Longchamp tells me that he will only release Richard in return for a ransom! And what a ransom! No less than One Hundred Thousand Thunder! Does he really think I'm going to pay? No, my brother left me his Kingdom, and I mean to keep it!

PLUS: Great detail and character. Fun puzzle solving. Entertaining.

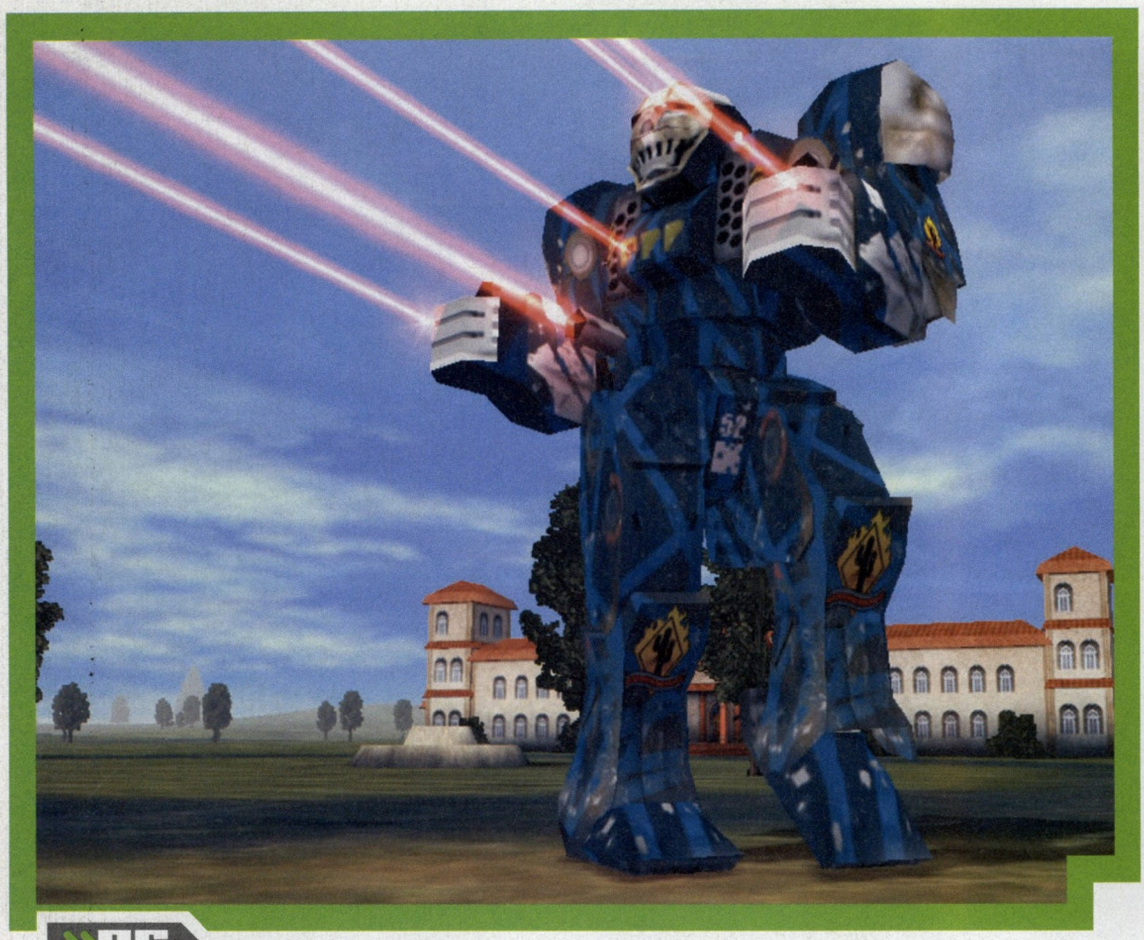
MINUS: Not a game you'd play more than once.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	74	83

OVERALL

83

Witty, wily and wonderfully fun.



Sublime Lime.

A sweet raspberry mech.

Lemon flavoured.

>>PC

MechWarrior Mercenaries

CATEGORY: Mech Combat >> **PLAYERS:** 1-16 >> **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** PIII 700, 128MB RAM, 3D card

FRANK DRY mechs out with his PC.

You might have thought that Microsoft would begin to neglect their PC development now that Xbox has been basking in the bountiful Microsoft development budgets, and yet as 2002 ticked by, solid Microsoft PC titles continued to be released. Just before Christmas, MechWarrior Mercenaries, a stand-alone continuation of MechWarrior 4 (rather than an expansion pack) was released amongst a bunch of other solid Microsoft titles. But is Mercenaries strong enough to carry us over to MechWarrior 5?

LET'S MECH LOVE

MechAssault on the Xbox may have abandoned the more technical, sim elements of the genre, but MechWarrior Mercenaries continues to offer something far more meaty for fans of the technicalities involved with piloting a virtual walking tank. Keeping track of your weapons functions and the status of each of your mech's limbs is still part of the experience. The controls are much more tailored to mouse and keyboard play these days, as opposed to the necessity of a joystick in yesteryear, and everything is so much more user-friendly than ever. Mercenaries has continued to perfect this set-up, and getting about and taking care of business couldn't be easier, no matter how daunting the control set-up appears upon your first outing.

In Mercenaries, naturally, the emphasis is on obliterating your opponents for cash. You can then use this money, primarily for buying new upgrades for your mech. It's simply this lust for cash, and for more powerful mechs, that will have to be your sole motivation for mastering Mercenaries.

!!! Check out: www.mw4mercenaries.com

QUITE PREDICTABLE

The only problem with all this mech action is that it just continues to be more of the same mech action that we've all now experienced many a time before. Duking it out with AI or human opponents becomes quite predictable, and you end up utilising the same tactics over and over to get yourself through alive. There's nothing terribly wrong with it – it's incredibly solid and enjoyable mech combat – it's just that we were really hoping that Mercenaries would try to introduce some new gameplay elements into the series rather than just new mechs and missions. After playing MechAssault, Mercenaries tends to look a little visually dated – especially in the way that buildings fail to have the same destructible qualities. Some fancy new features such as that would have gone a long way to making Mercenaries feel like more of a real progression for the series. Ah well.

What this game does have going for it is the variety of the mission structure... you're a mercenary after all, you shouldn't have to be retrying a mission over and over until you get it right. Just leave it in the dust and move onto a more lucrative offer.

Whilst console gamers enjoy the excellent robotic action of MechAssault on the Xbox, you can be rest-assured that MechWarrior fans won't be left out in the cold: the PC series continues to deliver. Hopefully, however, MechWarrior 5 will re-invent the genre in a big way. <<

PLUS: Scalable difficulty, great presentation, stable engine.

MINUS: Regurgitated gameplay and poor terrain.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	84	79

OVERALL

80

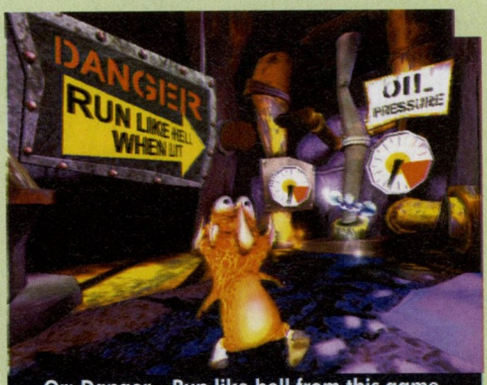
Predictable but solid mech action that should satisfy fans.

PC PowerPlay

CD PowerPlay AND DVD PowerPlay ON SALE NOW

Man, yo-yo tricks went out with Sea Monkeys.

Doesn't anyone know what a brake pedal is?



Or: Danger – Run like hell from this game.

»PS2

Haven: Call of the King

CATEGORY: Action >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >>
PUBLISHER: Midway >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >>
RATING: G8+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Young slave... strange dreams... chosen one... ancient prophecy... free his people. Fill in the blanks and you've got Haven's plot. Given the importance of a compelling narrative in a game such as this, it's astounding that the developer slapped Haven with a storyline ripped straight from the tattered pages of the oldest work of fiction known to man. Fortunately, Haven: Call of the King makes up for this shortcoming with gameplay that doesn't adhere to the standard platforming formula.

Haven plonks the player in a virtual world filled with vibrant colours, cool gadgets and unique modes of transportation. The game's environments are expansive, heavily populated and remarkably well-realised. A constant day/night cycle and a random weather system are used to great effect, with pleasing little touches – like the main character's habit of using his jacket hood to keep himself dry when it rains – further contributing to the player's sense of immersion.

Haven's platforming gameplay is complemented by an array of action segments that will see the player shooting up targets and adversaries, running to escape avalanches and piloting racing cars, jet boats, rocket packs and gliders. The shooting and rocket pack segments are frustrating and repetitive, but the excellent boating and racing segments make up for this somewhat. Haven's jack-of-all-trades approach is a gamble that, to a degree, pays off. Ultimately the game isn't as groundbreaking as it could be, but it offers a very pleasant diversion. - **Brett Robinson**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
84	83	74	76

»XBOX/PS2

Rally Fusion: Race of Champions

CATEGORY: Arcade Rally >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >>
PUBLISHER: Activision >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >>
RATING: G8+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

For those not tipped off by its title, Rally Fusion is the official game of the Michelin Race of Champions. But before you dismiss the ROC as the World Rally Championship's poor cousin, it has to be said that the ROC boasts a slew of race types that are a refreshing departure from the WRC's standard checkpoint and special stage races. Rally purists may scoff at the ROC's break with convention, but the attraction of Hill Climb, Rally Cross and Driving Skill challenges is undeniable.

In total, Rally Fusion offers 11 different race types, 19 vehicles and 19 tracks. The vehicles range from C-class dune buggies to A-class custom-built rally cars, with many of the cars in the latter category being banned from use in other global rally events due to their competition-shattering performance specs. Rally Fusion's tracks cut through some interesting locations, including rain forests, tropical islands and arctic glaciers, but the generic nature of the track-side scenery lends an unwelcome sense of familiarity to some races.

The game's visuals are one of its strongest attributes, with the rain and fog effects being particularly impressive. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of its audio, which is unremarkable in every respect. At the very least, the car engine sounds should have been beefed up significantly. On the whole, though, Rally Fusion is a very competent arcade rallying title, and a lot of gamers will be pleasantly surprised by its longevity and challenging gameplay. It's by no means a classic, but worth checking out nevertheless. - **Brett Robinson**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	62	76	70

»XBOX

Whacked

CATEGORY: Party >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >>
PUBLISHER: Microsoft >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >>
RATING: M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

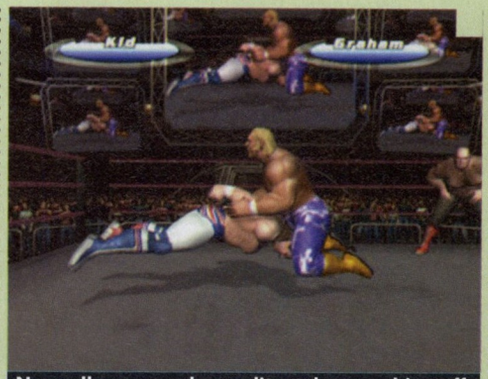
Hosted by the perpetually cheerful, patronising and insincere Van Tastic, Whacked is a seriously screwed up gameshow that pits the player against three other contestants in a battle royale for 'The Prize' – an unspecified but intensely desirable object of inordinate value. The venues for this nefarious competition of questionable morals and dubious rewards are 13 arenas, ranging from a vehicular graveyard to an orbiting space station. The arenas themselves are, like the rest of the game, colourful and varied.

Whacked features standard King of the Hill and Fragfest modes, as well as more unique types like Dodgeball (belt your opponents with nerf balls until they're unconscious) and Chicken (kill swarms of piranha-like chickens to collect the most stars). The game spoils the player with a selection of close to 40 weapons, including giant staplers, beehives, throwing tomahawks, exploding rubber duckies and baseball bats. There are also plenty of randomised powerups and bonuses – both of which may prove beneficial or detrimental to the player.

While the game's single player mode is entertaining, most players will breeze through it in a matter of hours. Admittedly, split-screen multiplayer can be rewarding, particularly when skilled opponents enter the fray, but most gamers will only experience Whacked at its best when Xbox Live is finally launched in this country. Consequently, although Whacked is chockers with sadistic humour, over-the-top violence and wickedly subversive post-mission adverts, at this stage it's probably not the wisest of investments. - **Brett Robinson**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
67	72	64	62

Argh, now I'm snowblind! Aiiee!



Normally you need a credit card to see this stuff.

Krusty Demons of Vert

»PS2

Alpine Racer 3

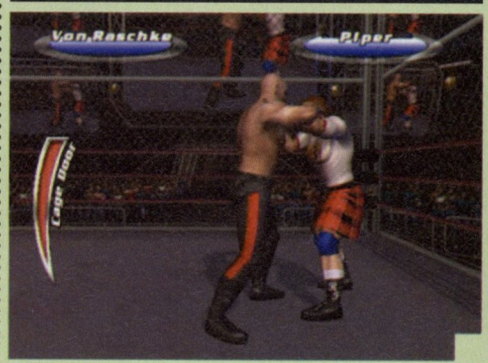
CATEGORY: Racing >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >>
PUBLISHER: Sony >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >>
RATING: G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Alpine Racer 3 is apparently a console-only sequel to Namco's downhill skiing arcade series. Unfortunately, it still feels fresh out of the arcades - fast and brainless with no real personality or longevity.

The heart of the game is the "Extreme Winner's Cup". Yes, it's possibly the worst name for a career mode ever. You pick a character, and go through a series of one on one races against the other "personalities" in the game. After each race you're awarded cash based on your time and the number of tricks you landed, with cash subtracted from the total for stacks and collisions. Cash can then be used to purchase better equipment, to increase your chances of success in the next match-up. However, if you lose a race you have to pay to attempt it again. So if you've just spent all your money on new equipment and you don't have enough to re-enter, it's game over. Similarly, the nature of the later courses means that you have to race them a couple of times to learn them, so running out of money means you have a long road ahead just to get back to where you were up to.

And there lies the game's biggest problem. If it was a little more forgiving there might be some incentive to keep playing, but the gameplay simply isn't compelling enough on its own. Aside from running at 60fps the visuals are very last generation and all you have to do is steer – tricks are fully automated. There's no real sense of actually racing against the competition either, and the course design lacks the spark to excite in such a pure racing environment. Put simply, we expect more from skiing and snowboarding games these days. Alpine Racer 3 just doesn't cut it. - **Cam Shea**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
68	55	57	58



»XBOX / PS2 / GCN

Legends of Wrestling II

CATEGORY: Wrestling >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >>
PUBLISHER: Acclaim >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >>
RATING: G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Somehow the first Legends of Wrestling (LOW) title managed to pass us by. How we could miss such a landmark title we're not sure. Maybe we were playing something good the day it came in. In any case, the sequel is here and Eliot has locked me in the games room to play it.

As the title indicates, LOW II is set during the glory days of wrestling. The days when Hulk Hogan was all potential and all man, before the 'roids started taking their toll. Before he got er... even more bald. Before his man boobs started to sag. Of course, since then we've had Hulk Hogan's Rock N' Wrestling, Suburban Commando, Mr Nanny, Trouble In Paradise and Hulk's ongoing presence in the wrestling world to enjoy, but there's nothing quite like seeing the Hulk of old in action. Or Andre The Giant for that matter.

LOW II features a somewhat unique fighting system, with the most emphasis being placed on grapples and holds via Acclaim's IPS system. This basically means that you can chain together sequences of grapples with the correct timing, and similarly your opponent can reverse those moves. It's a matter of watching the bar that briefly pops up on screen and going from move to move. The IPS system means that LOW II is less pick up and play, as it encourages you to learn what extension moves are available from certain holds and to memorise the patterns. It also means the fighting gets boring after a while as the action just doesn't feel all that dynamic. Combine this with long load times, frequent frame rate problems and this ends up being another unremarkable wrestling game. - **Frank Dry**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
65	60	59	59

»PS2

The Simpsons Skateboarding

CATEGORY: Skating >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >>
PUBLISHER: EA >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >>
RATING: G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

The Simpsons Skateboarding is further proof that videogames should not be designed by committee. This game isn't just an insult to Simpsons fans – it's an insult to gamers in general. Essentially what we have here is a piss-poor Tony Hawk rip-off where every redeeming feature has somehow been stripped out, then a rough coat of Simpsons paint has been slapped over the top.

Quite simply, developers The Code Monkeys have botched every aspect of this game. Levels are horribly designed will no chaining potential... not that it matters because even the fundamentals are broken. The controls are horribly unresponsive and the only flip trick you can land on flat ground is the kick flip. Every other one results in a stack, which ruins even the basics right from the off. To elevate the annoyance level even higher, Kent Brockman provides a running commentary, naming EVERY trick you do as you do it. Over and over. Even if you stack. Aaaargh! Not only that but the load times are amazing. Sometimes there will be TWO separate load screens to get to the next section. What's up with that? Also curious is the simian fetish that Fox/EA seem to have when it comes to Simpsons games. The Simpsons Wrestling was developed by Big Ape Productions, and now this comes to us from The Code Monkeys. We can't quite put our finger on why this is suspicious, but it seems to say "even a monkey could make a game that you suckers will buy".

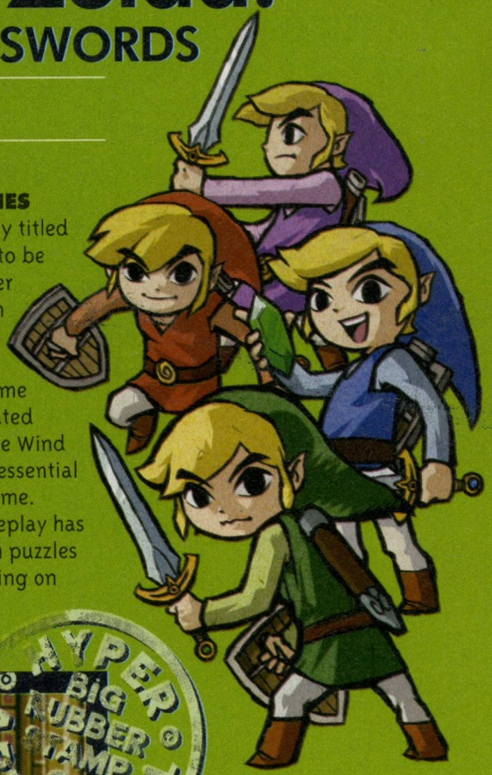
The only nice thing we can say about The Simpsons Skateboarding is that it's better than The Simpsons Wrestling. And that's like saying you'd prefer to eat dog shit over human shit. - **Cam Shea**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
50	50	20	30

The Legend of Zelda:
A LINK TO THE PAST/FOUR SWORDS

CATEGORY: RPG >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo >>
PRICE: $69.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

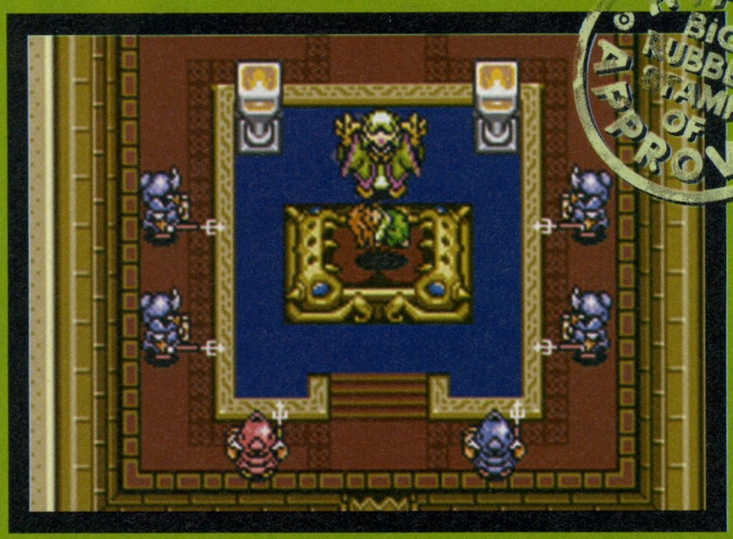
A Link to the Past would have to rank up there as one of the highlights of the 16-bit RPG landscape. It was one of those special games that still elicits warm fuzzy feelings in gamers today. Nintendo know this, which is why they've decided to bring the game back, GBA style. Nintendo also know, however, that it's a bit rich to ask old school gamers to shell out all over again for essentially the same game. So in addition to the original game, A Link to the Past on GBA also comes packing an all-new multiplayer mode – and no, we're not talking about that damn Mario Bros arcade game.



STEPPING ON SWITCHES

The new game mode, aptly titled Four Swords, would have to be one of the best multiplayer experiences on the system at the moment. It's a two to four player quest that takes place around the same time as the much anticipated GameCube title, Zelda: The Wind Waker, and team work is essential to getting through the game.

The familiar Zelda gameplay has been nicely tweaked, with puzzles like simultaneously stepping on switches and working together to lift heavy obstacles, and even enemies that require two people to defeat! Along with this is a series of different items players can use, such as the Gnat Hat which shrinks your character down to fit through small holes, and Roc's Cape which allows you to jump and float over gaps. Each player can only use one of these special abilities at a time, mind you, again encouraging teamwork.



The gameplay in Four Swords is an enticing mix of cooperation and greed. You see, the person who does the best on each stage is rewarded with a Medal Of Courage... and you wouldn't want your friends to have more medals than you, now would you? Nintendo have created a charming "cooperation battle" spirit here, where players work together to beat puzzles but suddenly it's every man for himself when there are rupees to be reaped. We really can't over-emphasise just how much fun Four Swords is, and how masterfully Nintendo have balanced the gameplay.

Link, we need you to cut the grass.

heavenly sound effect

REVAMPED GRAPHICS

It's also cool that layouts are adjusted depending on how many players are taking part, so if you're on a two player quest, puzzles will cater for two players, whereas a four player quest will have a whole range of cooperative puzzles. Four Swords sports completely revamped graphics too, so it looks much more contemporary than its single player partner. Also cool is that there is transference between the two games on this cart. Unlocked moves from A Link to the Past can be used in Four Swords. And beating Four Swords unlocks new mini-quests and dungeons in the main game. Sweet. Oh, and you can bet that there will be link-up capabilities between this title and Zelda on GCN...

What more could a gamer want? A pixel-perfect recreation of one of our all-time favourite games, combined with one of the most addictive multiplayer quests ever seen on a handheld. After all, the only thing better than one Link is four! Get yourself a slice of classic RPGing and quintessential Nintendo multiplayer action today! - **Frank Dry**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
86	87	94	93

»GBA

Doom II

CATEGORY: FPS >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** Activision >>
PRICE: $69.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Doom II is a timeless classic. This is a fact. It's also a fact that it has already appeared in one form or another on just about every console. Back in 1996, you could pick up a version of Doom on PSX that contained great renditions of Doom, Doom II and Ultimate Doom in the one package. Why then, are gamers being forced to pay a full $70 for each version of Doom on GBA? We'd heartily recommend the purchase if it was a compilation, but it seems a little steep to expect gamers to lay out so much cash for games that are almost free for PC and very cheap on other consoles.

But let's take a look at the game. Torus Games have done an excellent job. The original level layouts are very much intact (there are 30 levels in all), the bestiary is nice and authentic (17 of hell's nastiest creations), the double shottie is in effect and the action is as intense as ever. The engine is nice and smooth too, and can handle quite a few enemies on screen at once. However, despite the very sensible inclusion of gamma controls, it can still be very difficult to make out what's going on. The bland and dark texturing combined with the GBA's limited resolution make proper visibility very difficult.

If you've never played any of the Doom games before, picking this title up would make a lot of sense – especially if you can take advantage of the two player co-op. The rest of us can give it a miss.

- Cam Shea

Scariest. Pixels. Ever.

Double Shottie = gaming goodness

Black & Decker gaming.

Hey guys - this disco is pumping!

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
79	83	85	79

»GBA

The Two Towers

CATEGORY: Hack'n'Slash >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** EA >>
PRICE: $79.95 >> **RATING:** M15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Picture Diablo II with the *Lord of the Rings* license on GBA and you'll have a very good idea what to expect from this title. In fact, this is exactly what we were hoping for from the handheld companion to the best hack'n'slash console game of recent times.

It's amazing how much fun mindless action can be when paired with some RPG elements. Just like Diablo, you can equip weapons, armour, amulets, boots and so on through a straightforward interface, and you'll constantly be picking equipment like this up as you defeat foes, and discarding the lesser items as your backpack fills up. As you play you also gain experience points that can be assigned to strength, accuracy, health, defense and courage. Plus, there's skill points that can be assigned to a skill tree, allowing you to unlock both passive (such as the ability for Aragorn to wield two blades) and active (such as extra attacking moves) abilities. The quest to raise levels, equip stronger items and learn new moves is a constant incentive to keep playing, as is seeing more of Middle Earth.

Like Two Towers on PS2, you can play as a range of distinct characters. The GBA version has Aragorn, Gandalf, Frodo, Legolas and Eowyn... but no Gimli. An unlockable character perhaps? As much fun as this title is, much of the game takes place in dark dungeons and at night... and it's almost impossible to see what's going on. A gamma correction option would have been nice. So bear in mind that the screenshots on this page make this game look a LOT brighter than it actually is. Even so, The Two Towers is a great old school action RPG.

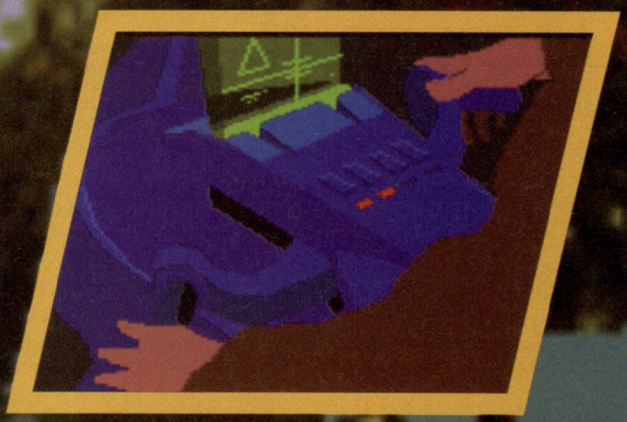
- Cam Shea

Miranda Otto carves it up!

Barrels instead of crates, oh well.

"Open Sesameee!" Er, Gandalf...

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
79	80	84	84



Flash back

>>SHAKIL 'SHAK' AHMED

Quite easily the best jeans and leather jacket in a videogame ever!

DATE: 2142 AD
LOCATION: Titan
FROM: Conrad B. Hart
TO: Doctor Phil McGraw
AT: The Oprah Winfrey Show

Dear Dr Phil,

I've got a slight problem. While doing an end of term paper on the Molecular Density Analyser – a pair of glasses that can measure the molecular density of an individual – I discovered a number of anomalies among us, individuals with a molecular density thousands of times higher than the average human. Amusing that our first contact with extraterrestrial life is with a bunch far more 'dense' than the average human.

Anyhow, they weren't too happy at being found out and my I.R.S tactics of finding out more went unappreciated. On my nightly meanderings in an empty neighbourhood, the aliens kidnapped me and wiped most of my memory. I managed to stumble off in the dark and snag a hover bike before getting shot down over a jungle that eerily reminds me of my backyard.

Unfortunately, I don't remember any of this, have just woken up with nothing but moss on my face, a gun and a prepaid envelope heading your way – and that paper is due at the Galaxia Bureau of Investigation next week. What should I do?

Sincerely,
Conrad B. Hart

If only they could have licensed the Toto song for the soundtrack...

Fortunately, Conrad saw it coming and in *Total Recall*-style recorded a message to his forgetful self on a holocube, sending the player off through the wilderness on a quest to New Washington where an old friend has most of his memories stored. The only way to get to Earth was to win the first class ticket as top prize on the 'Death Tower' TV show, and what with the ungrateful git not willing to part with any hard cash for an entry ticket, you're off and about the city, wandering through the subway on an assortment of missions. A long while later, you win the tournament and head home only to find out that disguised as government officials, the alien Morphs intend to invade Earth. Once more, you are taken captive, and once again you escape and journey to their planet which you destroy enlisting the aid of a dying professor who has been in cahoots with them for a long time.

LIFE-LIKE FLUIDITY

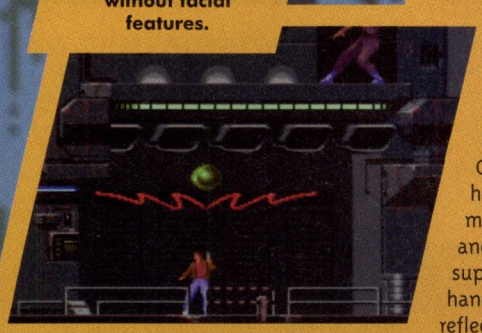
Delphine Software International had a definite winner on their hands when in the style of games like Prince of Persia and Another World they published Flashback on the Amiga in '92. It was soon released on Sega Genesis, Atari, SNES and DOS in '93 and eventually the MAC and Jaguar in '95, retitled Flashback: The Quest for Identity, winning a host of accolades including many 'Best of' (both the genre and console) awards. With its superior graphics, beautifully hand-drawn backgrounds reflecting the era and brilliant gameplay involving both fast-paced action and interactive objects (let alone revolutionising the gaming world) almost everyone remembers the 2D platformer. Some of us even remember where we were at the time: a seminar in the Hilton, Islamabad where most were watching Cliffhanger, marvelling at V-CD technology. That, or commenting on the life-like fluidity of the Flashback characters. Using a technique called 'rotoscoping', Delphine were able to reach a thus-far unmatched frame rate of 25 per second. Humanoid characters in-game had their animation derived from a process where actors performed the appropriate action and had their movements plotted out on a computer, then converted into sprites. Cinematic cut scenes were the biggest impression, with improvements on the vector system used in Another World allowing for some very fluid animation at a low processing power cost.

Moving from screen to screen, you'd climb platforms, pick up items, interact with objects, talk to people and elegantly dispose of enemies (though Blackthorne stole my heart with over the shoulder shotgunning). The interactive game took 2D platformers a quantum leap beyond what they'd done before, and with the game adapted to various consoles before DOS the controls had to be somewhat simple. Ha. Somehow, Delphine managed to squeeze running, jumping, climbing either way, crouching, rolling, running leaps, snagging higher ledge sprint-hops, using items, abusing firepower, holstering a gun and interacting with objects (and more!) into a D-pad and four buttons. Heck, with the gun equipped, Conrad would take on a different stance and his moves would change to suit the 'cool college student with guns' look as he took on mutants, droids, flying cops, and almost-impossible-to-vanquish Morphs. Surprisingly, though, the controls were incredibly easy to get the hang of. Instead of potions for life, a shield of four blocks (recharged at appropriate generators) protected Conrad from uncomfortable treatment. Ammunition was infinite, and a later acquired forcefield could be temporarily conjured up to bounce off enemy fire, but battles were best won by smart planning and a few decent tumbles.

THE RICOCHET OF BULLETS

The only cons to this massive game were twofold – the sounds and the saves. While no background music can add to the bleakness of the worlds being explored, the only ambient sounds remind one of the screech of squeaky chalk. The only decent sound effect otherwise was the ricochet of bullets on the wall, although cutscene music did just fine. However, action a screen away could be heard, which added to the suspense. Save points were few and far between, and replaying half a level could take a while. Fortunately, most SNES emulators and the like allow for saving at any point, which greatly improves the fun factor of these old games. One of the must-haves of all time, particularly if you're into platformers, Flashback was eventually followed by Fade to Black. Although some fans felt alienated by the 3D vector graphics in the sequel and its release only on PC and PlayStation, it was a brilliant game in its own right. If you can, it's worth dusting off your older consoles or hunting about online to buy a second hand copy, but I seriously doubt anyone will plan to part with such a classic. <<

Must be hard to find your way around without facial features.



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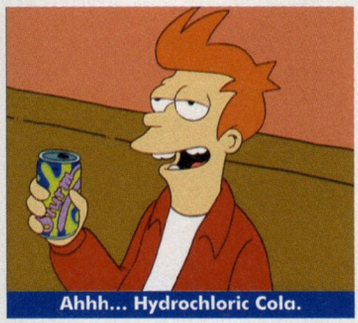
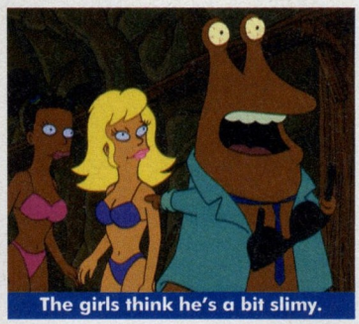
DVD Reviews

DVD is the format of choice for anyone who's serious about their home cinema experience. Every issue we review the latest movies as well as the latest in anime. Kick back and let Hyper help you decide what you should watch! All scores are out of 10.

Futurama: SEASON 1



Ahhh... Hydrochloric Cola.



The girls think he's a bit slimy.

Hyper: The board game!

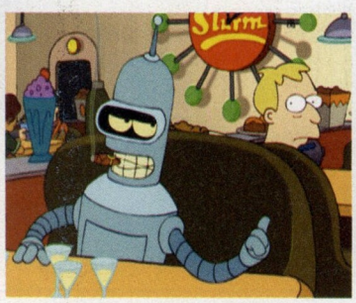
20TH CENTURY FOX, PG

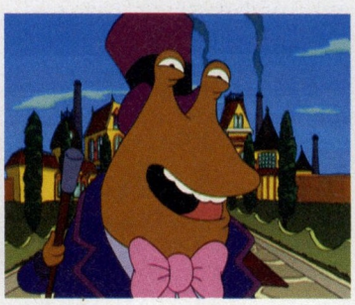
After ten years with The Simpsons, Matt Groening left to pursue a new project – Futurama. The result is another classic animated series that essentially does for sci-fi what The Simpsons did for the nuclear family.

Futurama is set in the year 3000, at a time when humans have scaled incredible heights of technology and explored the Universe, yet as a race are just as short-sighted and idiotic as ever. Indeed, it's the juxtaposition of the foibles of humanity with the now-realised potential of the future that is the central theme of Futurama. The characters embody this dualism perfectly, with the dull-witted but loveable 20th century pizza boy Fry, and the homicidal, alcoholic robot Bender being the picks of quite a large core ensemble cast.

Futurama episodes tend to focus on a singular narrative as opposed to the more multi-threaded approach of The Simpsons, and although both programs hit the mark in terms of social commentary and pop culture parodies, they're really quite different. Futurama is largely a vehicle for satirising science fiction clichés, and its mature cast and futuristic setting give the writers great scope to go crazy.

This 13 episode box set is well worth picking up. Right from the start Futurama hit the ground running, with strong writing and a fantastic mix of traditional cel animation and slick CG. The extras will definitely please the fans too. There are some deleted scenes, a short featurette, a fascinating stills gallery of early sketches, and cooler still, the animatic for the entire pilot episode! It's the audio commentary, however, that is hands down the highlight of the package. Every episode has Matt Groening, alongside a varying selection of writers, directors, producers and voice actors (the awesome Billy West and John Dimmagio included!). It's truly insightful and entertaining stuff, running the gamut from behind the scenes facts and anecdotes, discussions of cut scenes and script changes, to in-jokes, film references, easter eggs and ad-libbed lines. These guys really sound like they loved working on the show and frequently crack up at the gags. For fans, this one is worth the price for the commentary alone. - **Cam Shea**





MOVIE: 8 EXTRAS: 8

Jay & Silent Bob Strike Back

BUENA VISTA, MA15+

This is the fifth film in Kevin Smith's Jersey "trilogy" and the first to have the dynamic duo of Jay (Jason Mewes) and Silent Bob (Kevin Smith) take center stage. The basic premise is their trip to California to stop production of a film based on the comic book characters they inspired - Bluntman and Chronic. Unsurprisingly, complications and wackiness ensue, and Jay even falls in love. The narrative is secondary though as *Strike Back* is just meant to be laugh-a-minute mindless fun.

The number of cameo appearances is staggering. Just about every person who was in one of Smith's previous films makes it in, and the list of well-known names is quite amazing. We're talking Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Chris Rock, Mark Hamill, Shannen Doherty, Carrie Fisher, James Van Der Beek, Jason Biggs, Marc "I sucked in *Buffy*" Blucas, the phenomenally gorgeous Eliza "I ruled in *Buffy*" Dushku and plenty more. Even big name directors like Wes Craven and Gus Van Sant make self-deprecating cameos.

Watching the film is only the entree, however, as the second disc is completely stuffed with extras. The highlight would have to be the huge number of deleted scenes, each one introduced by the chain smoking Smith and Mewes. *Strike Back* isn't the best of Smith's films, but the sheer value for money makes it a more than worthwhile purchase. - **Cam Shea**

MOVIE: 6.5 EXTRAS: 9

Bluntman and Chronic do their best Eliot and Cam impression.

Globe World Cup Skateboarding

STOMP, G

In early 2002, we sent our intrepid ad manager Chris down to the Globe Skateboarding World Cup in Melbourne. He had a complete blast and came back with tales of Tony Hawk, Bucky Lasek and co... all intentionally designed to make the skating component of the Hyper crew (me and Malky!) insanely jealous. At the time, we wondered if we'd be able to get some footage from the event... and now, many many moons later, it's out on DVD!

This is quite a nice compilation, covering both the vert and street competitions. There's about an hour of footage all up, taking you through the semi finals in both, then into the finals. The event played host to some top notch skating too, with Bucky Lasek winning the vert competition and Rick McCrank (that name has gotta be a fake) winning the street.

I think he forgot to kick the flip.

In addition to the extended footage, there's a highlight reel, stack reel and look at the girls' competition. We're amazed, however, that Tony Hawk is in no way featured on the DVD. After all, it was at this very competition that he did only his second 900 ever. Why isn't that on here? Or one of the demos he did?

The picture quality is pretty rough, but skaters are used to that by now, and it doesn't really detract from the experience. What does, however, is the illiterate American commentator for the event. He really should have been given a crash course in English before being let loose with a microphone. His repeated use of the term "most winningest" was one of our favourites, helping him embiggen the competition with his promulent performance. - **Cam Shea**

MOVIE: 5 EXTRAS: 2

Neon Genesis Evangelion

BOX SET COLLECTION

AV CHANNEL, M

Surely everyone out there has seen or at least heard of Hideaki Anno's ground-breaking anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Well, now the box set is here, it's time to take another look.

The story goes something like this. At the turn of the 21st century, "Angels" first appeared on Earth, and mass destruction of Earth's population ensued (yep, post-apocalyptic Tokyo again!). Since then, a secret organisation known as NERV have been preparing for their return, and in the year 2015, they do. Piloting huge Evangelions to battle the Angels are a number of teenagers (it's always teenagers right?). The storyline intertwines the incredible battles between the EVAs and Angels with a very human insight into the lives of the pilots.

Evangelion features amazing mecha designs by Ikuto Yamashita, fantastic animation, and a compelling and complex storyline rife with both hope and angst, and an undercurrent of philosophical and religious questions. The box set contains all 26 original episodes and they're still as entertaining as ever. We are, however, rather disappointed with the insignificant smattering of extras. There are basically none. There isn't even a booklet to go with the box set. It's a pity that this isn't a true "collector's edition" but simply a "collection". - **Frank Dry**

MOVIE: 9 EXTRAS: 1

Steve shows us how to do a number two in the outback.

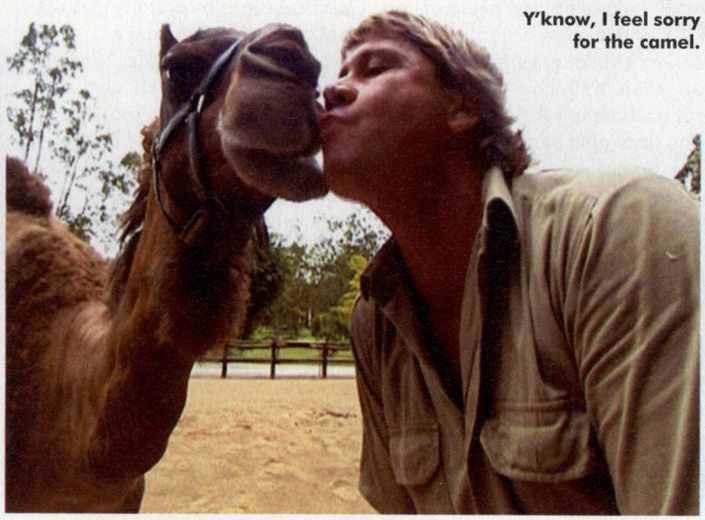
The Crocodile Hunter

MAGNA PACIFIC, G

The release of this six disc collection of classic Crocodile Hunter moments, compiled from Steve's show on the U.S. cable network Animal Planet, might not be cause for celebration for some. Let's face it, Steve "Overenthusiastic Manchild" Irwin is not to everyone's taste. But beneath his almost caricature-like style resides a man with a message, a passionate conservationist whose devotion to the natural environment and its inhabitants is nothing but admirable. And his frequently violent interactions with dangerous creatures makes for some highly entertaining viewing.

The episodes on the six volumes begin with some background about Steve and move through his various adventures relocating crocodiles at Australia Zoo; journeying through Central Australia and Cape York; hanging out with Orangutans in a remote jungle village; searching out deadly snakes in Africa; and getting chased up trees after triggering a feeding frenzy of vicious Komodo Dragons. Each disc contains two 50-minute episodes. There aren't many bonus features to speak of - biographies, animal profiles and trailers of the other discs are pretty much it. Yet each disc is such a comprehensive package of insanely brave and amusing moments that any of these DVDs is a more than worthy purchase. - **Elizabeth Shea**

MOVIE: 8 EXTRAS: 3



Y'know, I feel sorry for the camel.

Porn Star: THE LEGEND OF RON JEREMY

STOMP VISUAL, RATED R

Look what Ron found in his pants!

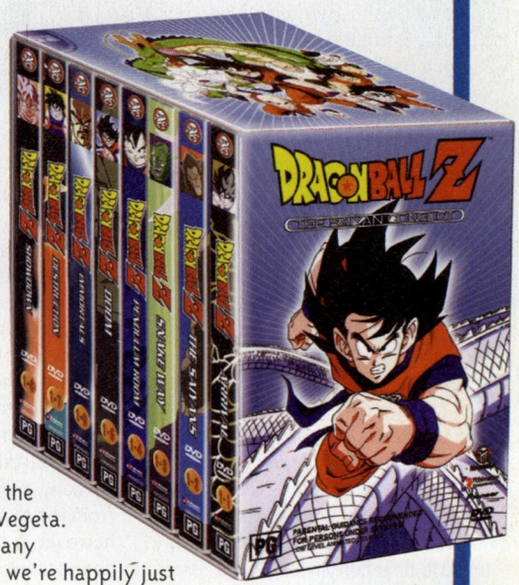
This is a hugely entertaining portrait of Ron Jeremy, the undisputed King of male porn actors. Short, fat and supremely hairy, he's known as "the hedgehog" (shiver), but he has also turned out to be a terrific comedic actor and a very witty interview subject. We see a lot of Jeremy's work, from when he was younger and slimmer, and it's like watching a young Dustin Hoffman with a nine-inch tool.

Jeremy comes across as a likeable little boy, still trying eagerly to make it in mainstream movies even though he's a multi-millionaire and the undisputed master of his profession. In a way he's extremely sweet: an innocent possessed of a quick wit and a long shlong who still has stars in his eyes.

Although the film completely glosses over the nastier elements of the porn industry, it succeeds superbly as light, and very funny entertainment, and has a lot to say about the cult of celebrity in America. Don't expect to see anything explicit in this documentary, there's no sensationalist editing here, and unfortunately there are also no special features of merit. - **Christopher Johnson**

MOVIE: 8 EXTRAS: 1

WIN DRAGONBALL Z: THE SAIYAN CONFLICT BOX SET!



■ *Dragonball Z: The Saiyan Conflict* contains volume 1.1 to 1.8 — eight complete DVDs of this popular TV anime. These are the episodes that show you how it all started: Goku learns of his alien heritage when his brother arrives on Earth and kidnaps Gohan, Piccolo takes Gohan into the wild country for special training and the rest of Earth's defenders prepare for the arrival of Nappa and Vegeta. This is a cool grab for any *Dragonball Z* fan, and we're happily just giving it away!

To be in with a chance to win this box set, just answer the following question:

What is Goku's cloud called?

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and post it to: **Dragonball Free, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016.**

ANIME

Strange Dawn

CATEGORY: FANTASY
PRODUCTION COMPANY: HAL FILMMAKER

Schoolgirls Emi and Yuko find themselves in the middle of a war after a mysterious light transports them into a strange new world. It looks like Earth, its inhabitants refer to themselves as "humans" and they all speak perfect Japanese – except that they're all miniature-sized chibi-sans.

POLITICAL INTRIGUE

Broken down, *Strange Dawn* is, basically, a Japanese take on Gulliver's Travels. It's a strange, otherworldly yet medieval place. Emi and Yuko are revered as the Great Protectors as foretold in legend, except Yuko and Emi won't have a bar of it and would rather go home. Thus begins their journey to find a way home, helped by a local village hero who looks an awful lot like Brave Fencer Musashi.

Strange Dawn is immaculately designed and animated, taking a page from the Studio Ghibli style of design; and with music that's strangely reminiscent of other fantasy greats like the *Lodoss War* OAV, or even *Ninja Scroll* at times. Unfortunately, the story plods along at an agonisingly sluggish pace. There's a great deal of history, mythology and political intrigue underlying this series, but it takes a great deal of time for it to be revealed.

Another problem is that the protagonists are almost completely unlikeable. One is self-centred, spoilt, bratty and completely dispassionate, while the other is whiney, inquisitive to a fault, and possibly stupid. Their bite-sized supporting characters are more fascinating, but again, they're limited by the pace of the story.

Strange Dawn is passable entertainment for viewers with patience. The more jaded viewers might find it a bit of a yawn-fest, though.

ANIMATION 8 PLOT: 6 OVERALL: 7

Hey girls, want a threesome?

We must stop this evil hairdresser!

Zone of the Enders: Dolores, i

CATEGORY: SCI-FI/MECHA
PRODUCTION COMPANY: SUNRISE
DISTRIBUTOR: MADMAN ENTERTAINMENT (AVAIL. MARCH/APRIL)

It might've been rubbish on the PS2, but don't use it to prejudge the OAVs it's inspired. *Dolores, i* is part of a set of origin stories about the Orbital Frames, this particular one centring on the one known as Isis (the bright pink and red one with a phallus-shaped cockpit between its legs).

MILDLY ENGAGING

It doesn't make a great first impression. The animation is rough and garish to the eye, almost American-looking, but then the artistic direction of the series seems to change haphazardly – one episode has sharp defining lines and bright neon colours, and the next might look softer, more subtle, and with actual depth of field. One could almost mistake them for different cartoons entirely.

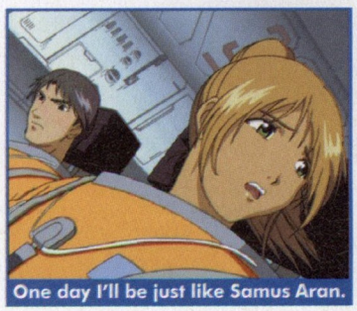
The future that it depicts is nearly (but not) as fascinating as that of *Cowboy Bebop*; and despite the clumsy dialogue, a real effort has been made at a character driven drama.

This OAV follows the footsteps of James Links, a down-and-out cargo freighter who finally decides to turn a new leaf and make peace with his estranged son and daughter. Unfortunately, the job that he takes in order to get back to Earth to meet his children puts him in the middle of a major military conspiracy. Actual combat is far and few between, but the family drama that unfolds makes it worth the wait.

ANIMATION 6 PLOT: 7 OVERALL: 7

Damnit, no condoms fit on this thing.

"Would you like fries with that?"



One day I'll be just like Samus Aran.

Post-surgery, your breasts will be so.

Subscribe to HYPER for your chance to win the console of your choice!

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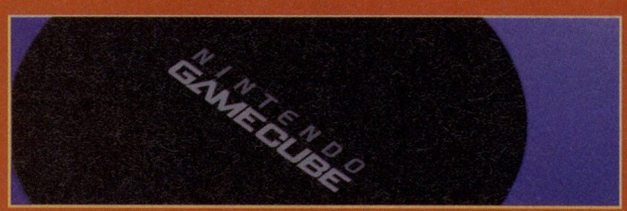

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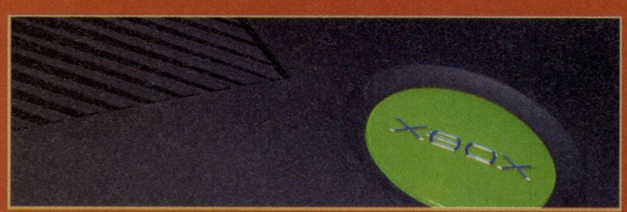

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Just Subscribe!

Mortal Kombat has entered a new age. Available in February for PS2, Xbox and GameCube, **Deadly Alliance** sports a brand new fully 3D engine and new fighting mechanics. With a touch of Soul Calibur style weapon elements and some brand new characters, even the Hyper crew have to admit that the new Mortal Kombat game is shaping up to be something out of the ordinary.

To celebrate its multi-platform release, Acclaim and Hyper want to offer **one subscriber** this month **the console of their choice** and a copy of **Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance** to play. We'll even throw in a Mortal Kombat t-shirt and a copy of the Mortal Kombat comic. **TEN runners-up** will also **win a t-shirt and comic**. All you have to do is subscribe to Hyper this month!

First Prize
Console of your choice
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Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
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Mortal Kombat comic

10 Runners-up:
Mortal Kombat t-shirt
Mortal Kombat comic

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FORUM

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Q. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON MICROSOFT'S PURCHASE OF RARE?

It was probably the biggest piece of shock news to go from rumour to reality in 2002, so it's no surprise that Hyper was flooded with mail from upset Nintendo fans on this topic. Where were all the letters from happy Xbox owners? Were they just being quietly smug about it? In any case, the general opinion is that it was sad to see Nintendo let go of Rare so easily, but that the possibilities for amazing Rare games on the Xbox hardware is too exciting to ignore. Here's what some of you had to say on it...

HYPER FORUM

We all have a different opinion and the Hyper Forum is where you can get your thoughts out of your head and onto the page for all to see. Don't forget that we have a new topic every issue! The next topic of discussion...

? "The most over-rated game I've ever played is..."

Responses will be printed in Hyper 114.

E-mail: FREAKSCENE@NEXT.COM.AU with Hyper Forum in the subject line, and the topic of discussion at the top of your response. Please note that very long contributions may be edited.

UP THEIR SLEEVE

What do I think of Microsoft purchasing Rare? Well, there are certain things that we can always count on in our lives. The sun rises each morning, Brian Henderson delivers the nightly news **(Er, not any more, sadly... – Ed.)** and Rare makes games for Nintendo. Hmmm... perhaps we should invest in light bulbs.

It seemed somewhat inevitable, given how persistent those rumours were, but when I heard the news it still felt as though the bottom of the world had fallen out from under me. People may disapprove of such a reaction - hey, I'm not too pleased about it myself - but this is after all an opinion. I was disappointed. I was saddened by the thought of not seeing their games on Gamecube and GBA in the future. **(You WILL see Rare games on the GBA – Ed.)**

However, Rare's great strength in the past was their focus on a single platform in order to get the most out of its capabilities, something they will still be doing over at Microsoft. So the dedicated fans of Rare need not despair, merely switch/spread across platforms. The only thing that they (and the Microsoft loyalist, if such a thing exists) have to worry about is if the promised 'five games in two years' produces rushed efforts not worthy of association with Rare's past efforts.

For the Nintendo loyalist this is indeed a grave blow, as one of their greatest assets has been lost to the enemy. I can only assume Nintendo knew what they were doing, since they were reportedly offered the chance to purchase Rare outright. But the absence of Rare is actually a relief, in some ways. I still plan on getting a Gamecube and the list of must-have titles is already too long for my meagre budget to handle. It would have been impossible if they continued their run of success in Nintendo's stable.

The moral of this story? I haven't a clue. Maybe: Rare will be fine and hopefully Nintendo will too. They certainly have enough quality up their sleeve to survive.

Johann Celestri

DEMISE OF THE XBOX

Hi guys at Hyper,

When I found out that Rare had been bought out by Microsoft, I was annoyed. Ok, I was pissed off!! I couldn't believe that the company that had produced all those great games for my beloved N64, and all Nintendo consoles before that would no longer make games for them! Conker's BFD was one of the best games on the N64, and now it's going to be on the damned Xbox!!

After a while I read that the Stamper Brothers had left Rare **(At this stage the Stamper Brothers are still at Rare – Ed.)**, and also most of the original crew had moved to other companies. This brought my hopes up a bit, as I realised that the guys with the experience would be elsewhere. Now my emotions are mixed, I will miss seeing Banjo, Conker and other Rare greats on the GameCube, but then again, I can sit back and laugh at the poor Xbox developers as they bring out bland, unoriginal versions of the games. So while the former members of Rare pump out great games for the Cube, the Microsoft developers can screw up the characters as much as they want. Thanks for the games and memories Rare, I look forward to seeing great new games, and also the demise of the Xbox!!

Thanks guys,

Aron Quigley

MIXED FEELINGS

This news is met with mixed feelings from me, one as a big Nintendo fan and secondly as a new Xbox gamer. As a Nintendo fan it's somewhat distressing. Until now I've only ever owned Nintendo consoles, ever since that Christmas in '90 when we woke up to find the good old NES through

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Word up – it's Kameo on the Xbox!

to the 64 which is still kicking in this household with its multiplayer sessions. Amongst the collection of games that I have collected for that machine includes almost every Rare title, from GoldenEye to Perfect Dark and Donkey Kong to Conker. These, apart from the Nintendo classics, were the few games that meant, in my eyes, the Nintendo64 was still the best machine, the PlayStation may have the quantity of games and the users but they were missing out on some of the best games ever produced. The idea that these games would only grace the Gamecube would mean that again, Nintendo gamers would be able to happily play these franchises, almost assured of their quality. Without these titles I feel that the Gamecube will struggle.

On the other side of the fence are my feelings as an Xbox owner. Now I'm older I made the decision that I wanted Microsoft's beast thinking about the future (PS2 you just didn't cut it for what I needed - 2 controller ports only?), hoping that someone in the household will still get the Gamecube. I'm astounded by the graphical capabilities of the machine and the potential for a good developer, and Rare, in my opinion are one of the best around. The thought of Perfect Dark on Xbox is something almost incomprehensible... I can't wait!

Matt

PISSED OFF

Ever since the Stamper Brothers reverse-engineered a grey shoebox to create Slalom (I think it's called that) and showed Nintendo that third parties CAN be trusted, I always thought that the big N, much like a surrogate Japanese ohzumo father, would always have Rareware under it's flabby, protective arm and give it the man-boob nourishment needed to grow and become immortal. After all, these guys crafted Goldeneye, a spy epic culmination of not only their quintessential godliness as developers, but also their very British identity which set them apart from the Japanese gaming ideals and provided a much needed flavor, like when strawberry first stood alongside chocolate and vanilla to create the juggernaut that is neapolitan.

However, although a shock to most, nothing lasts forever and Nintendo said sayonara to Rare. Now this, I found, was unexpected, but I thought "It's about time - Rare seemed like they wanted to move out of home and move into their own luxury apartment anyways, and by not limiting their content and going multiplatform they can finally make games that everybody can enjoy!" Oh how I was wrong. And, like a condom on an incontinent weak-bladdered pornstar, I became pissed off.

It's not the fact that they've moved from exclusivity to exclusivity, nor that I don't own an Xbox (hey, I'm all for multi-platform love). It is because, of all people, MICROSOFT bought them out. What is their problem? Is 44 million a week not enough to line your pockets, Billy-boy? Microsoft are the devil's incarnate combined with a modern day Roman empire, only with the word "smart" attached. Mark my words people, the day is not far off when we will be wearing Microsoft "smart jocks" and their phrase will be changed from "Where do you want to go today?" to "You don't have a choice :-P"

Jiffyman

PROBLEM SOLVED

It's kind of hard to answer this question. As a long time Nintendo fanboy who's looking at switching over to the Microsoft camp (when I get the money), I've got two opinions...

1) What? This sucks! Not that Microsoft has gotten one step closer to monopolising another industry, but that Nintendo would actually be stupid enough to sell Rare. Rare was, without a doubt, the greatest developer in the N64 era after EAD. Just think of the games; Goldeneye, its superior sequel Perfect Dark, Banjo Kazooie And Tooie, Diddy Kong Racing, Conker's Bad Fur Day... The list goes on.

Nintendo could have risen to the heady heights of market domination once again on some of the titles that Rare had planned for the GCN - I know nothing at all about Perfect Dark 0, for example, but I would have bought a Cube on the basis of it.

For Nintendo to survive this, it's going to have to invest the millions it got for Rare into some serious chunks of other developers. The new Retro Studios is looking good, but that won't be enough. I'm thinking Sega might be a good idea, if a tad expensive...

2) Alright! Rare + Xbox = Gaming nirvana. I was reluctantly looking to the Xbox as my next console, but was blinking back tears that, on my pocket-money budget, I might miss out on playing Rare's next generation of classics. Now though, I can buy my monstrously big console, lug it home in a wheelbarrow and rest easy that Perfect Dark 0 and Kameo will be mine.

Problem solved!

Scott Stevenson

HATE MAIL

One word - AAAAAAAHHHHHH!!! I'm mighty disgruntled about this whole Rare-being-bought-out-by-Microsoft bizzo. So angry in fact, that I'm burning all my Rare N64 titles RIGHT NOW. Well, not really, but anyhow, I bought the Gamecube not long ago, and I bought it solely because I assumed that I'd have my hands on a gleaming copy of Perfect Dark 0 in my hands very, very soon, crafted by the masters at Rare. Now that they've been carted off elsewhere, I might have to renounce my Nintendo faith and place it in the powerhouse that is Xbox. Crap, that means I'll have to fork out another $400. It also means Nintendo are about to get a whole lot of hate-mail from me...

Damien Hicks

WORK THAT BOX

As a devoted Rare nut, I've gotta say it's an interesting move but not a particularly bad one. When you think of the general standard Rare employ in their games, they can't possibly think this is going to change with Microsoft.

Microsoft have no small amount of quality games themselves, and also, to the people who have a grudge against Microsoft for whatever reason, get a grip guys. Are you jealous of the big Bill's fortune or what? He comes up with the cutting edge ideas first so tough on the rest. Look at the Xbox and its hard disk. Sooo obvious, yet nobody did it. He's no dimwit and Rare know it and trust Microsoft's resources enough to jump on board. I love Nintendo but the Xbox is the fastest rig out there, so I say "Go Rare, work that box and show us what you can do".

Winter

Soon to be Conker's bump-mapped fur day.

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MAIL

HYPER LETTERS:

78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW 2016 Australia
E-mail: freakscene@next.com.au

NOT WEARING PANTS

Dear Hyper Crew,

Please get my letter, because I'm not going to write it again! Well anyway, down to business with the questions!

1. Are they making any Tomb Raiders for the PS2?
2. I'm thinking of getting a console but I'm not sure which one to get! Can u help me? Oh and which one has the best shoot em ups?
3. Who's the big boss of the Hyper crew?
4. Are use guys like those lazy guys who don't get any exercise and become big blobs?
5. Do you know when Final Fantasy XI will be out for Japan or Australia?
6. Is there ever gonna be a Jedi Knight 3 (because number 2 ruled)?

That's all my questions. Like Qui-Gon Jinn says in the PSX Phantom Menace, "The door is open. Let's close it, because there's a cold breeze outside and I'm not wearing any pants". Cya,

The Big Blurg

Dear Big Blurg,

1. Sure is. It's just late. Amazingly it was the first Christmas, I think ever, that Eidos didn't release a Tomb Raider game. Anyway... Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness will be out on PS2 in February.

2. We don't tell people what console to buy – all we can do is offer advice on the games and let you make up your own mind. The Xbox has some good shooters, and more on the way, if that's what you really want.

3. Me. BWAHAHAHA!

4. No, with the strict Hyper exercise regime of ten laps around the back streets of Redfern (you learn to run pretty fast), we'll never get blobby.

5. FFXI has been out in Japan for a while already. There is still no PAL release date though.

6. Probably. As long as Raven don't do it...

EPISODIC HYPER

Hyper dudes,

I've been a loyal reader of your magazine for years now, and I must say it totally dumps on other gaming magazines. Dumps, I say! Though, the reason I write to you now is to make clear my one major gripe. You see, I wait for a whole month to get your magazine (which seems like a really long time on most occasions) and then it takes me a mere couple of days to read the thing cover to cover. We're not maximising potential here! This month, I even tried to ration it so as not to waste it, but there's no damn use! It follows me everywhere.

Fortunately, I have a solution to suggest. You must send me issues of Hyper in installments. I no longer want to receive the whole magazine in the mail once a month, but instead, I wish to receive 25 pages of each issue weekly. That way, I'll receive one whole issue each month, but I won't be waiting three and a half weeks for my next fix!

On a slightly related issue, I also wanted to mention that Hyper has a longevity that other magazines dream of. Just last month, I used a playguide written by Eliot (yes, you!) years ago, to work my way up to Rick Bruiser in Super Punchout (damn you, Rick, I'll get you yet!). Whoa. I just read this letter back to myself and it's all quite pointless. But you guys are just so... good! At making magazines! Had to let you know.

Bar

P.S. I agree with Goatse from issue 110. Lit comps! Lit comps!

Dear Bar,

Dumping is what we do best! There used to be a Hotline for Hyper addiction, but I can't seem to find the number... oh well, you'll have to suffer in the greatness of it all! Super Punchout on the SNES... I remember having to do that. It was somewhat tricky. Gee, I was but a wee lad then, so full of optimism, better eyesight and everything... sob.

METAL GEAR SOLID POO?

Hey Hyper,

Me and my brother have been buying your mag since issue 80 something (the one with MechWarrior 4 on the front) and frankly, I wouldn't buy anything else. But lately I've noticed something about your magazine - NO METAL GEAR SOLID 2!!!! This is extremely upsetting for a true MGS freak such as myself. Now I'm not sure whether or not you've reviewed it or not (I might have missed that issue) but I noticed that you said that GTA3 was better! (see issue 110, Mail, Good Old Fashioned Questions)

What don't you like about it? The storyline makes Steven Spielberg seem like an amateur, the graphics are smoother than a bar of soap down a waterslide, the music sounds like it was done by an actual orchestra and the gameplay is so involving that when you get seen you feel like your (as in, the player's) life is about to come to a premature end! Just sneaking up behind an enemy and using the "Freeze" move should be enough to convince anyone!

If I am mistaken and you actually have given it a good review, please accept my sincere apologies. If not, BLAU to you!

Falcon

Dear Falcon,

No... BLAU to YOU, my friend! We reviewed Metal Gear Solid 2 in issue #101 (March, 2002) and it scored 96%. Which means we like it. Lots.

QUESTION TIME PART XVIXIII

Dear Hyper,

First of all, great mag!

I am so pissed off that Perfect Dark 0 won't come out on the GameCube. Perfect Dark on the N64 was the best game ever!

Now I have got a few questions:

1. What's the better game out of Super Smash Bros. Melee, FIFA World Cup 2002 or Sonic Adventure 2?
2. Do you know if there will be any Zoids games coming out for the GameCube and if so, when?
3. What do you people at the office think is better: Xbox, PS2 or a GameCube? I would just like to know.
4. The comps are great, but could you make some more GameCube ones please? In Issue #110 the two comps are both for the PS2.
5. What rating out of 100 would you give SSBM?
6. What do you think would be a good first buy for the GameCube?

Thanks for your time,

Josh.L

P.S. Could you send your answer back via email, just in case I somehow forget to purchase the next issue?

CAPTION THIS!

PART 37 WINNER

Gee, not as many ring jokes as we had hoped. Oh well, this month's winner is none other than Hyper reader, **David Spiller**.

Frodo knew to run when the Dark Rider offered him candy to get on his horse

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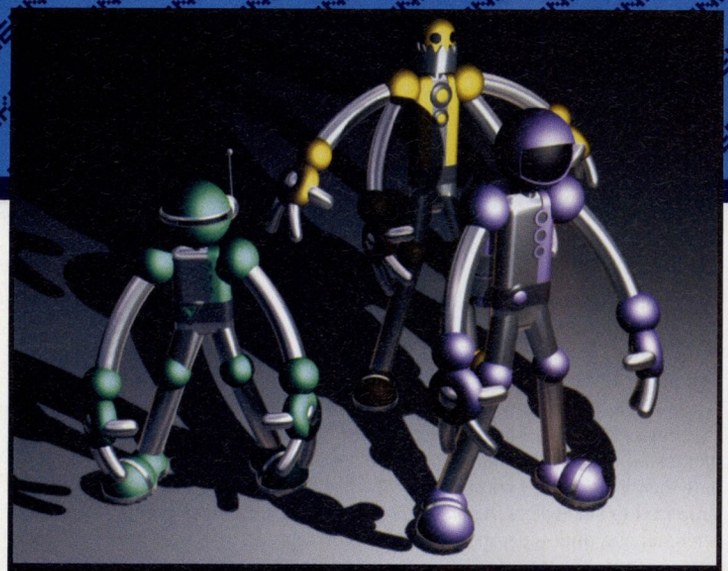

Daniel Reid has some very nice 3D skillz.

Dear Josh,
1. Too easy! Super Smash Bros. Melee.
2. There is one coming out in Japan, but we're not sure if it will see a Western release.
3. I bet you would. We have all three, and can't imagine life without each one.
4. Sorry! We try to mix it up.
5. Super Smash Bros. Melee scored 93% in issue #105 (July, 2002).
6. Super Mario Sunshine would be a guaranteed good time purchase.
Email you back? Ahh, but you fail to understand the first rule of Fight Club... er, I mean Hyper Club... you must buy the magazine!

PLETHORA OF PLETHORAS

Greetings Hyper
I'll get straight to the point. I realised that you guys use "plethora" quite a bit in your reviews of games and whatnot. And it makes me laugh every time I see it! Did you ever see *The Three Amigos*? I'm thinking you have and I was wondering if you use that word because of a funny scene in that movie. If I'm mistaken then I am a fool and please just answer these questions.

Why are game creators these days not creating co-operative play for games? Some of my most memorable gaming moments have been in co-operative games. Is the coding too hard? Can't they be bothered? It is a well-known fact that the lastability and gameplay of a game can be extended and beefed up just by adding a bit of co-op e.g. the Quakes, a patch for Rune allowed co-op play, Dungeon Siege, Jedi Power Battles, Perfect Dark, and even the old classics like Bubble Bobble and Snow Bros. We need more Co-op! It's fun to destroy a friend in a Multiplayer match but just as cool to team up against a horde of nasties.

When is the World of Warcraft going to be released in the land down under? Any news on Thief 3 or Half Life 2?
Cheers
Stefan B

Dear Stefan B,
Fool of a Took! We just overuse it, I guess. We totally agree with you on the issue of co-operative play. It's a blast, and shamefully absent from so many games that would suit it so well! Come on developers, keep bringing gamers together!
World of Warcraft has no release date yet, but I wouldn't expect to see it until very late 2003. Thief 3 is looking brilliant, and it has some very cool new features like interactive lock-picking, and a new lighting system that will really affect gameplay (like guards being able to spot your shadow). Half-Life 2 has vanished into a black hole of late.

SAVE... RELOAD

You know you've been playing games for too long when you achieve something decent in real life and you have the slight urge to "save game".
Pete The Elite

Dear Pete,
If only we could use cheats in real life. Like the "instant hot girlfriend" cheat, or the "get rich quick" cheat.

F*CK OFF

Dear Hyper,
I really enjoy your often humorous & informative magazine and was wondering if you could answer a few questions.
1. Why is it that the word f*ck is always censored in your excellent publication? I collect other magazines that appeal to kids and they do not censor the word. Is it because Hyper feels more morally responsible (being a video games magazine) or are you forced to?
2. Why are so many PC to console titles reviewed and not the other way around? It would have been nice if you could have covered Grand Theft Auto 3 on PC as it was the best version yet and one of the best games last year.
Could Hyper at least make a mention of good PC games that will not be reviewed as some of us PC gamers pay less attention to the console reviews so could therefore miss good conversions. Yes, there is PC PowerPlay but I find your reviews to be more in-depth and less generous of high scores.
3. Has there ever been a sim builder game with the emphasis on constructing houses?
4. Any news on a Mafia 2 game? I thought Mafia was great but thought your computer allies (Paulie, Sam) could have been a little less dumb during combat. :-)
Thanks for a great magazine.
Ryan

CENSORED

Dear Hyper Comrades,
I have just been perusing the net, and stumbled across a New Zealand gaming shop. The first thing I noticed were the raft of ads aimed at Australians for the games: GTA: Vice City and The Getaway. The gist of the ads was that you should buy these games through the New Zealand shop as they can offer 'uncut' versions of the games.
My 2 questions: firstly, does this mean our friends across the Tasman actually have an R-rating for games? (I believe we still only have MA15+?) and secondly, more importantly, does this mean that we will be getting edited, sanitised versions of GTA: Vice City and The Getaway for the PAL release of the games in Australia?
Two of the most highly anticipated games of the year especially edited for Australian consumers!? I HOPE NOT! I'm sure I speak for my fellow gamers by saying that if the answer to my second question is yes, then we are being cheated!!
DR D BEAR.

Dear Dr. D Bear,
Firstly, straight from the www.censorship.govt.nz website, "Under section 8 of the Act, video games are exempt from labelling requirements, and don't have to be classified - unless the game would be likely to be restricted if it was classified." Basically meaning that unless it's full of porn or dodgy gratuitous violence, it'll get released. So yes, GTA: Vice City and The Getaway will go uncensored in New Zealand.
Here in Australia, The Getaway had a 40 second cutscene removed (of a guy getting tortured) and Vice City had a few small things removed that don't affect the gameplay. So, yes, we've copped censored versions, but the edited bits were very minor, so I don't think it's anything to be too upset about.

You've won an exclusive 360 Modena Racing Wheel for PC! Replica of the wheel in a Ferrari 360 Modena.

Don't forget to include your contact details in your letter.

THRUSTMASTER® http://au.thrustmaster.com
Wheel valued at $99.95.

Bill Page brings us this very cool red Samus.

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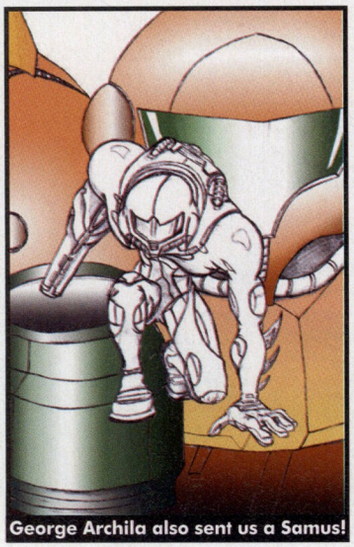
MAIL



George Archila also sent us a Samus!

Dear Ryan,

*1. Get off our f*cking back, eh? Why the f*ck can't you just be happy that we don't edit out the whole f*cking word, eh? F*ckstick! We do have younger readers after-all... impressionable young things. Shhh!*

2. PC to console ports usually result in very different games, as consoles up until now haven't been able to handle a lot of the content that PC games have had. However, console games on PC tend to be exact replicas in most cases. That's our excuse anyhow.

3. The Sims let you build a house in quite a bit of detail, don't you think? I don't think there's been another. Otherwise, go get AutoCad Max 2003... okay, maybe we made that up.

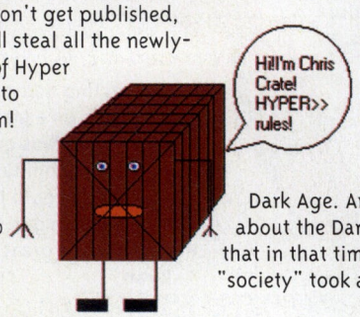
4. I'd say there will be a sequel, yes. Not announced yet, though.

CHRIS CRATE!

Hey all at Hyper

Well, seeing as you guys love crates, I designed this little mascot for Hyper to perhaps to go on the website or in the mag. His name, as you can see, is Chris Crate, and he carries around large supplies of Hyper inside him to satisfy his gaming needs.

By the way, Chris also doesn't like it if my letters don't get published, so if it isn't, he'll steal all the newly-printed copies of Hyper and you'll have to print them again! Also, if you want me to make any modifications to him (sunnies, afro) just ask, and in the next week I'll send him off. Anyway, off the crates. Some questions for you guys.



1. Seeing as I only have a GameCube, should I get Star Fox Adventures or Tony Hawk 4?

2. Have any of you guys ever dabbled in game creation?

3. My PC is 300Mhz and 32 megs of RAM. Time to upgrade?

4. If I'm saving for a new console (PS2 or Xbox) which should it be? FFX and MGS2 look awesome, but Halo and Project Gotham...

5. Might not seem like much, but I want more Eye Candy. I reckon 4 pages should so it.

6. Could you get Cam to "take down" Steve from Nintendo Gamer? They haven't published my emails 3 times...

Okay, see ya everyone at Hyper.

Paul

Dear Paul,

Chris Crate rocks, we love him! Ahhhhhh!

1. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4. Personally, I thought Star Fox was a bit of a disappointment.

2. Other than the odd Quake level, nope.

3. Shit yeah.

4. Ahh, the dilemmas of life...

5. Does anyone else want this?

6. I've just sent him over with a big cardboard tube to "whack" him.

THE NEW DARK AGE

Dear Hyper,

Before I begin, I would like to do some serious arse kissing... ok, down to business

1. I was on my computer playing CS, and after the first hour, I began to hear voices in my head saying things in languages I've never heard. I was wondering if this was supposed to happen or if I should go see my Dr. again.

2. The day before, I was reading the hyper mag Mail section and found a message, which attracted my attention. This message said:

Begin quote: "so maybe we should take a step backwards and achieve the gaming greatness we once had" End quote.

Coincidentally, that same day at sch**l in h*st*ry, we spoke about the Dark Age. Anyone who knows about the Dark Age would know that in that time, the human "society" took a step back in technology and everyone's life screwed up.

I myself wouldn't like this to happen, even though the only reason why I live is to read Hyper and play computer.

So what I guess I'm trying to say is that Hyper mag rules, the new age of games will do for people who don't hate their lives, I don't know if I'm supposed to hear voices in my head after an hour, and Hyper mag RULEZ!!!

Matt Cuneo

BTW, if I was a critic I would give Hyper 10/10.

Dear Matt,

Sorry, we'll have that Hyper spyware implant removed. I'll send some of the boys around...

GAME OVER GAMECUBE?

Dear Hyper,

After looking at the latest console figures (550,000 PS2, 120,000 Xbox and 42,000 GameCube) I have come to a conclusion that Australia doesn't like the Nintendo GameCube.

The unit itself has all the key ingredients to be a flop in Australia – no DVD, low value, kiddy (Yes, I know it isn't) and pirate proof – all the opposites of what a gamer wants.

DVD capability really is important in Australia as only one purchase is needed to do that and play games, the kiddy argument could be rectified with a week long advert blitz but I don't think that will happen and we all know a very large percentage of people buy the other consoles for cheap pirated games and value.

I know the GameCube has great games and many more on the way but they will never help the system sell if people don't know that they exist. This is the biggest problem caused by Nintendo Australia – they point blank refuse to advertise anything with a higher than a G8+ certificate and only ever on Channel 10 during adult oriented TV shows increasing the kiddy aura every other Nintendo area is trying to get rid of.

Advertisement of mature titles is needed and not just on the one channel but branched out to other areas such as music events, night clubs, giant billboards on the side of the road, radio plus more.

This would hopefully increase its sales resulting in more spots in junk mail which in turn would sell more units along with word of mouth.

Another problem that haunts Nintendo is that the very market (kids) they have fought so hard for has now become the domain of Sony and co and that any nine year-old will tell you that a GameCube is for babies and they like adult games e.g. GTA3. Primary Schools across Australia are literally chanting the GameCube is for babies, Sony is cool and they love adult games that they can't even buy.

Nintendo need to stop being arrogant and stop living in the past and get in on the act, otherwise they will lose eventually.

Nick Mcfarlane

Dear Nick,

Nintendo have always been successful with the younger gaming market, so it's no surprise that they would want to continue that dominance (seeing as Sony and Microsoft were going to be fighting over the mature gamers anyway). This tactic doesn't seem to be working however, and we're sure that Nintendo will re-evaluate their Australian strategy and look at ways of boosting GameCube sales in this country. EA's harshly worded press release announcing their GCN price cuts would certainly have sent them a strong message that they need to be more aggressive in their marketing tactics here.

Luc666 sent in our third cool Samus this month!

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The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
2	◆	Lord Of The Rings 2 Towers	RPG
3	▼	WWE Smackdown 4 S.Y.M	Sports
4	◆	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Sports
5	▲	Kingdom Hearts	Adventure
6	▼	V8 Supercars	Racing
7	▲	Need For Speed Hot Prsuit 2	Racing
8	▲	Ratchet & Clank	Adventure
9	✪	Dragonball Z Fighters	Action
10	▼	Red Faction 2	Action

TOP 10 PlayStation Games Over $40

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
2	▲	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Sports
3	✪	Space Chase Pack	Compilation
4	▼	Stuart Little 2	Adventure
5	▼	Lilo & Stitch Trble In Pards	Adventure
6	▼	FIFA 2003	Sports
7	▼	World Rally Champ 02 Arcad	Racing
8	▲	Treasure Planet	Adventure
9	▼	Harry Potter & Philosopher	Adventure
10	▼	Jonah Lomu + WTC	Compilation

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $40

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Mario Party 4	Family
2	◆	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
3	▼	Starfox Adventures	Adventure
4	▼	Super Mario Sunshine	Adventure
5	▲	Super Smash Bros: Melee	Action
6	✪	Bond 007: Nightfire	Action
7	▼	Time Splitters 2	Action
8	▼	Eternl Darkns Sanity Requim	Adventure
9	✪	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Sports
10	▼	Star Wars Clone Wars	Action

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $40

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Adventure
2	▲	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
3	▼	LOTR: Fellowship	Adventure
4	▲	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Sports
5	▼	Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind	RPG
6	▼	Sega GT 2002	Racing
7	◆	Blinx	Adventure
8	▲	Need For Speed Hot Prsuit 2	Racing
9	▼	FIFA 2003	Sports
10	✪	Bond 007: Nightfire	Action

TOP 10 PC Games Over $30

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
2	▼	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
3	▼	Age Of Mythology	Adventure
4	◆	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
5	◆	LOTR: Fellowship	Adventure
6	▲	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
7	▲	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy
8	▼	Medal Of Honor Spearhead	Action
9	✪	Need For Speed Hot Prsuit 2	Racing
10	▼	Battlefield 1942	Action

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $40

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
2	▼	Game & Watch Gallery Adv	Compilation
3	◆	Yoshis Island: SMA 3	Adventure
4	▲	Dragonball Z: Legacy Goku	Action
5	◆	Lord Of The Rings 2 Towers	RPG
6	✪	Metroid Fusion	Action
7	◆	LOTR: Fellowship	Adventure
8	▲	Super Mario World Adv 2	Adventure
9	▼	Monsters Inc	Adventure
10	◆	Mario Kart Super Circuit	Racing

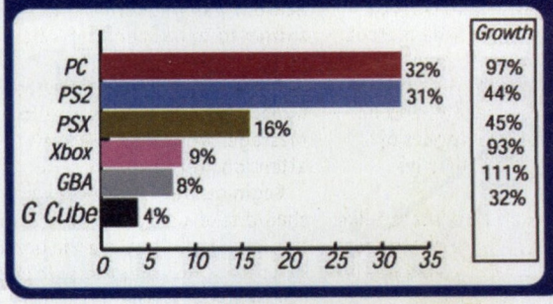
TOP 10 All Full Priced Games

W/E 1 December 2002 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	PlayStation
2	✪	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Xbox
3	▲	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	PlayStation 2
4	▼	Lord Of The Rings TwoTowers	PlayStation 2
5	▼	WWE Smackdown 4 S.Y.M	PlayStation 2
6	▲	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	PC/MAC
7	✪	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	GameBoy Adv
8	✪	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Game Boy
9	◆	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	PlayStation 2
10	▼	The Sims Unleashed	PC/MAC

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

OCT 02 vs NOV 02 RETAIL SALES



✪ New Entry
◆ Non Mover
▲ Up from last week
▼ Down from last week

inform

Charts can be viewed at **www.informbd.com.au** *as part of Inform's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly*

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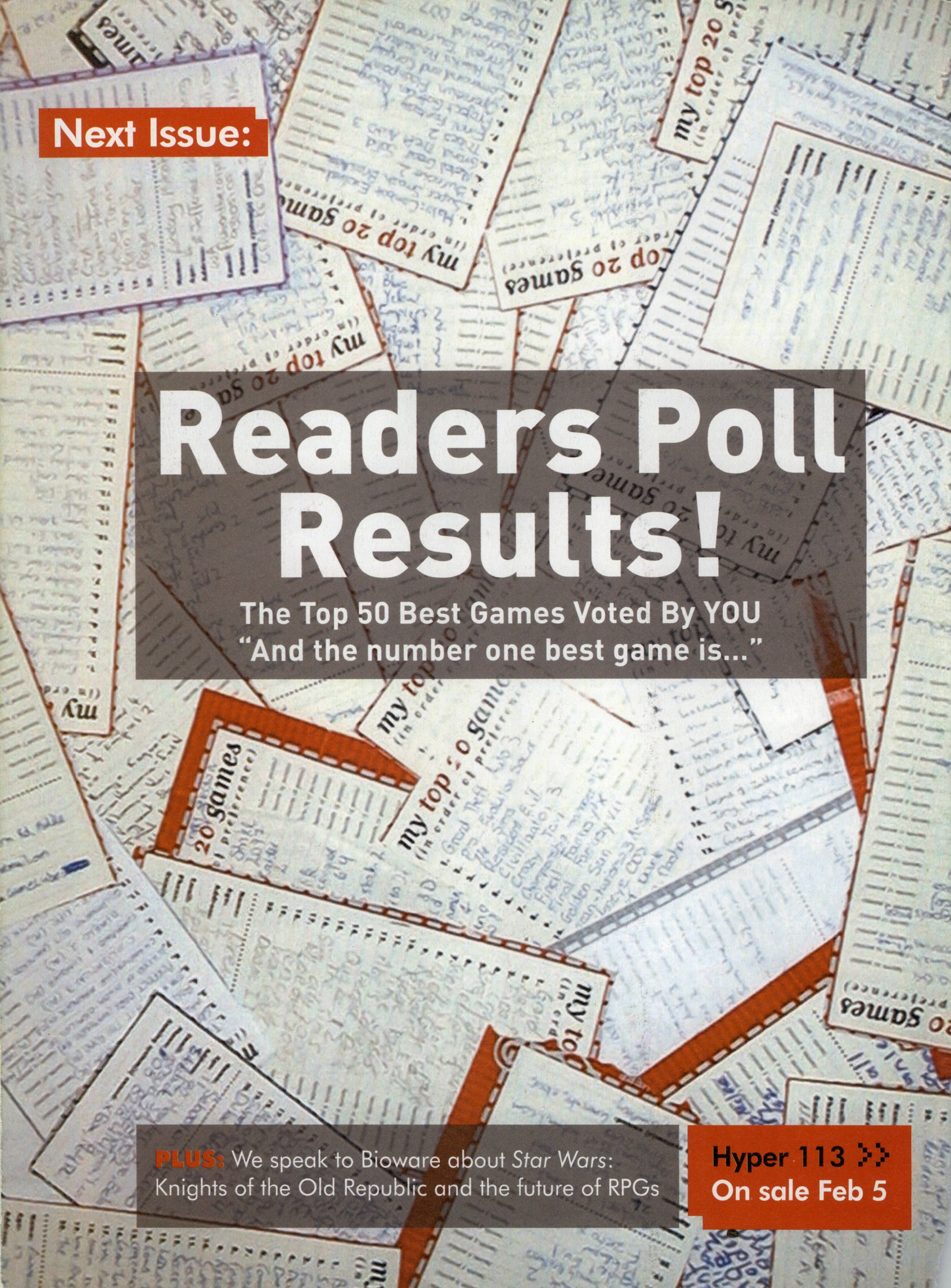
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The Top 50 Best Games Voted By YOU
"And the number one best game is..."
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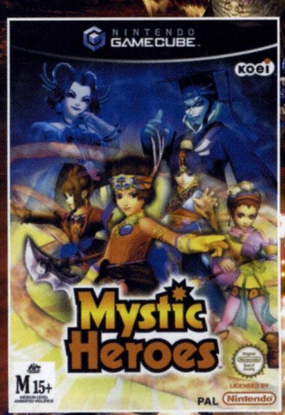

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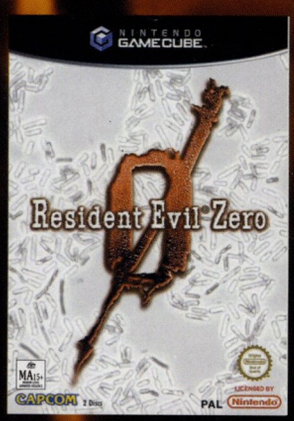

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