SQUARE ENIX: FF FEVER!

BIOSHOCK: WE GO HANDS-ON!

HYPER

X360

HALO 3

HANDS ON WITH BUNGIE'S LATEST "KILLER APP"

RETRO

SNATCHER

Hideo Kojima's Forgotten Masterpiece

X360

NARUTO

Ubisoft Reinvents The Ninja

PC

STARCRAFT II

After 9 years Blizzard's revolutionary RTS returns

PS3/X360

KANE & LYNCH

The Original Odd Couple

PS3/X360

TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

Can RTS Games On Console Actually Work?

Reviews:

- Tomb Raider XBOX 360
- Super Paper Mario Wii
- Rogue Galaxy PS2
- Ninja Gaiden Sigma XBOX 360
- Pokémon Diamond/Pearl DS
- Colin McRae Dirt XBOX 360

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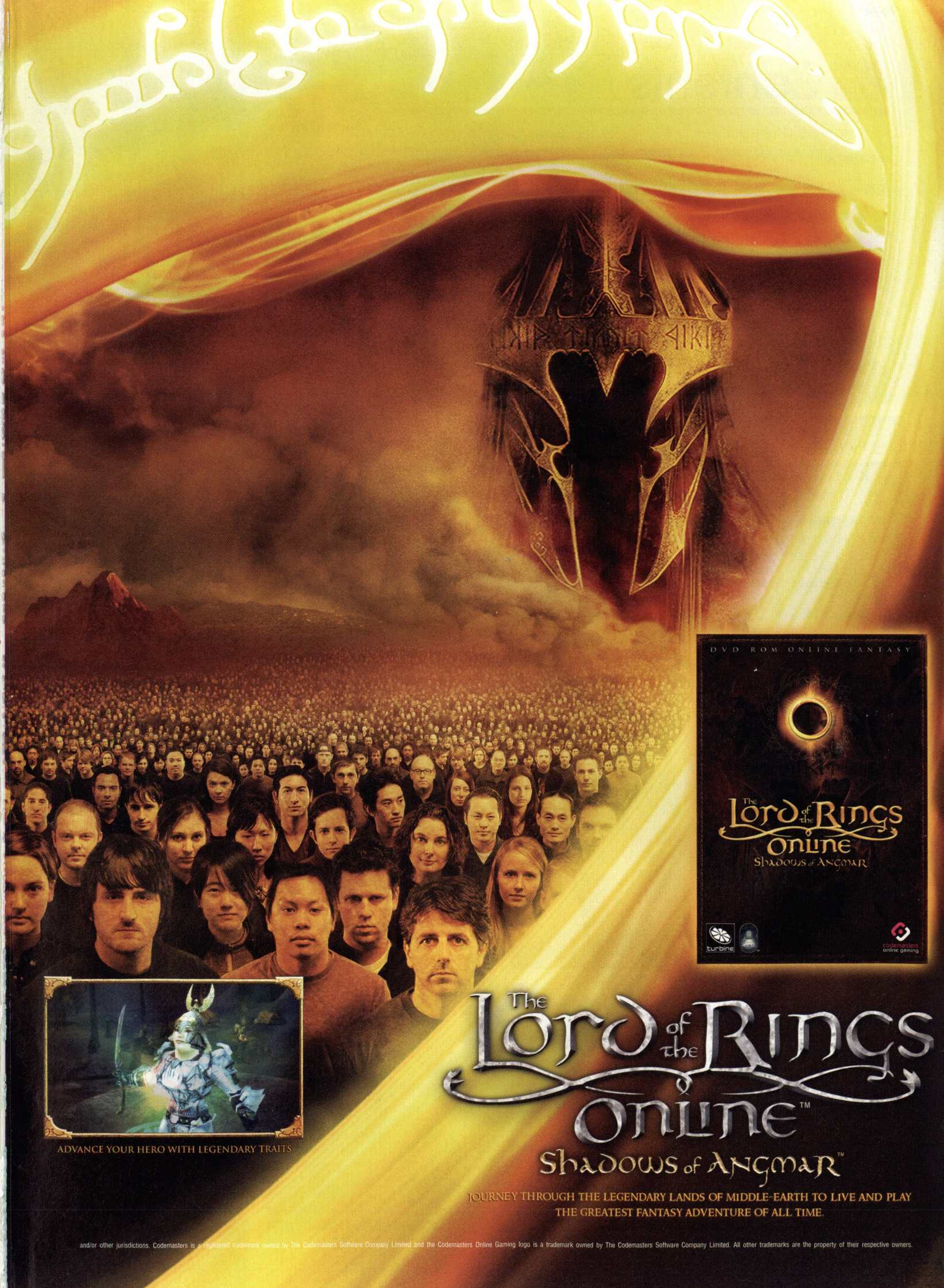

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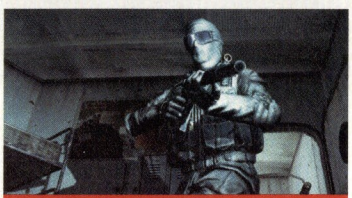

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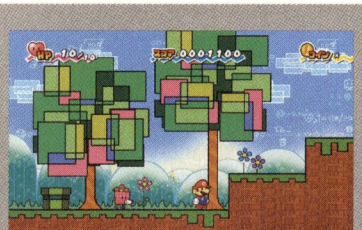

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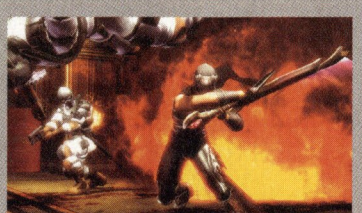

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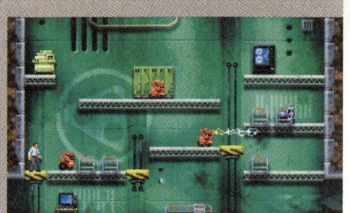

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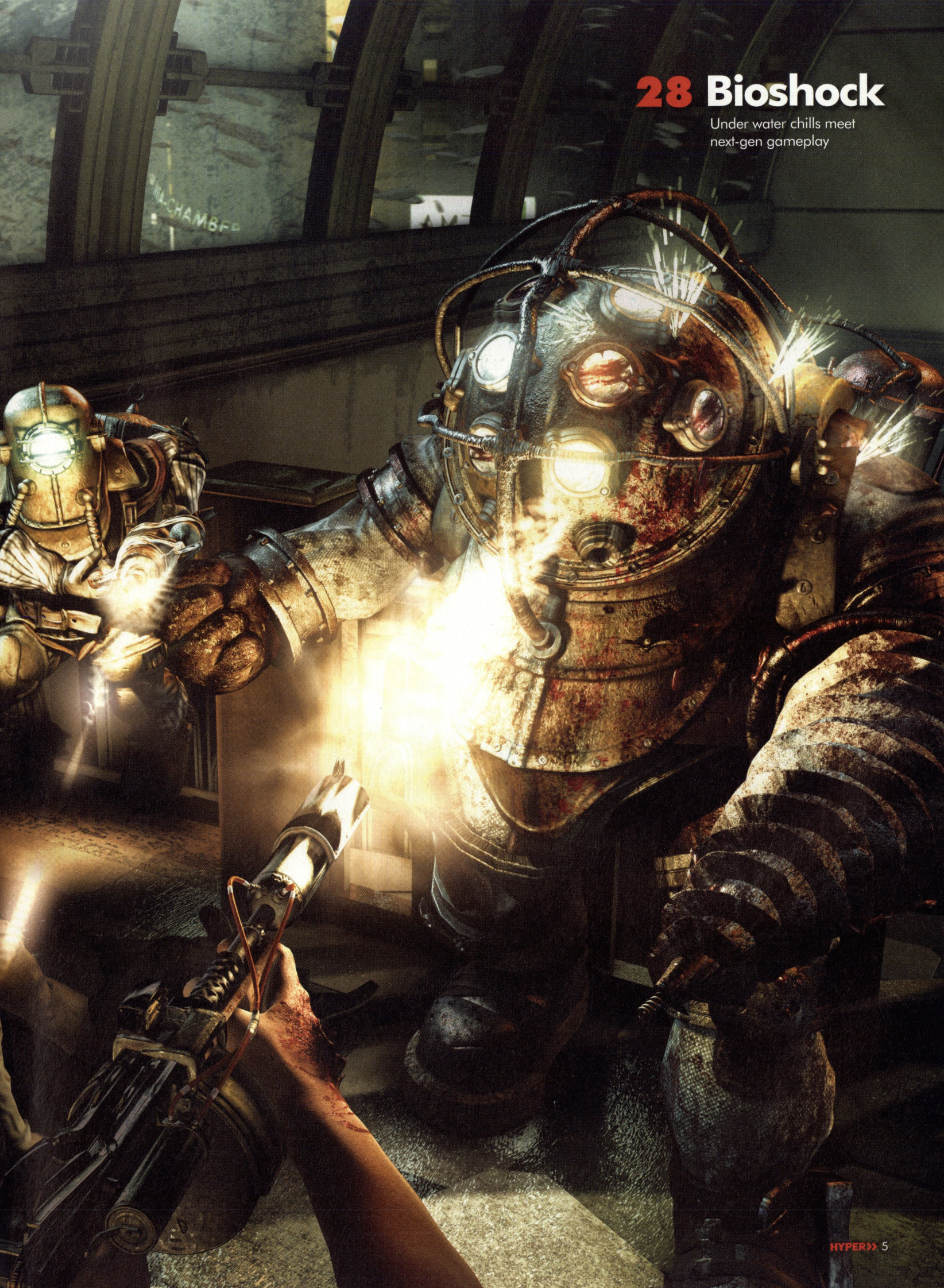

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Under water chills meet next-gen gameplay

HYPER»
JULY 2007 ISSUE 165

Editorial

»Welcome to the 165th issue of Hyper, Australia's best selling (and only) multi-format gaming magazine. That's kind of a lame way to introduce the issue but when it comes to the end of a long production cycle the creative juices are a little hard to get flowing and this month has been especially long. Even though E3 have been one of the true mainstays of the gaming scene for years, nobody seems to know just what the hell is going on with this year's new look E3, so, as a result, many distributors are holding their own events to showcase their products. This month I headed to San Francisco to check out some of the upcoming titles from Ubisoft, with titles ranging from the anime styled ninja game Naruto through to the new Tom Clancy franchise EndWar but the true highlight of the show was a new film IP they are currently working on, Beowulf, thankfully not based on the shitty Christopher Lambert film of the same name. Unfortunately due to embargos and NDAs we haven't been able to bring you a preview this month, a real disappointment as it was the most exciting thing on show, including the 40 odd seconds of new Assassin's Creed footage we waited hours to see (not that I'm bitter or anything).

Anyway, enjoy issue 165 – we think we've put together a real corker of an issue, chock full of features, previews and reviews with tiles including Snatcher, Kane & Lynch, Age of Conan, Super Paper Mario, Colin McRae: DiRT and Rogue Galaxy. See you next month with a whole new batch of gaming goodness.

Daniel Wilks »Editor

Hyper Crew

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **DiRT** – *Xbox 360*
   "Dirt never looked so attractive"
2. **LotR: Online** – *PC*
3. **Rogue Galaxy** – *PS2*
4. **KoF: Maximum Impact 2** – *PS2*
5. **Snatcher** – *PC*

MOE – Deputy Editor

1. **Castlevania: Symphony of the Night** – *PSone*
   "Have at you!"
2. **Ninja Gaiden Sigma** – *PS3*
3. **Metal Slug Anthology** – *PSP*
4. **Snatcher** – *Mega CD*
5. **GTA: Vice City Stories** – *PSP*

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **Final Fantasy XII** – *PS2*
   "Ding 60"
2. **Crash 'n Burn** – *PS2*
3. **Loco Roco** – *PSP*
4. **Sid Meier's Pirates!** – *PSP*
5. **Trog** – *Arcade*

TIMMY B – Ring In

1. **S.T.A.L.K.E.R.** – *PC*
   "The buzz that only gamma-rays can provide"
2. **Overlord** – *PC*
3. **City of Villains** – *PC*
4. **Evil Genius** – *PC*
5. **Okami** – *PS2*

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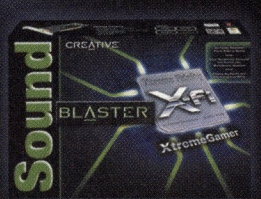

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ZERG!

StarCraft II Revealed

South Korea's wildest dreams come true

South Korea loves StarCraft. The game is officially a phenomenon there, with more than a third of the world's copies of StarCraft ending up on South Korean shores. The country has an entire television channel devoted only to StarCraft, and professional StarCraft players are treated like rock stars whenever they take to the stage to compete in nationally televised competitions. So, when the game's developer, Blizzard Entertainment, were thinking of a place to unveil its first true sequel, they could think of no better location than South Korea's capital, Seoul.

The world had been anticipating the announcement of a new game from Blizzard for the past couple of months now, and there had been rumours that the new game would be a new chapter in the Diablo series, an RTS sequel in the WarCraft series, or even a massively multiplayer online game set in the StarCraft universe, presumed to be titled "World of StarCraft". Instead it was plain old StarCraft II that was outed in front of the more than 10,000 applauding South Korean fans, who crammed into the Seoul Olympic Park gymnastics stadium to attend Blizzard's annual World Wide Invitational gaming tournament.

How do I shot laser?

The unveiling began with a pre-rendered cinematic trailer, showing a Terran marine being bolted into his armour, only to finish the clip with the cigar-chomping marine saying, "it's about time" into the screen.

Next was to reveal the actual game. With vastly updated visuals, the conflict between the Protoss, Terran and Zerg units has never looked better, with the chaotic streams of laser fire in particular looking amazing.

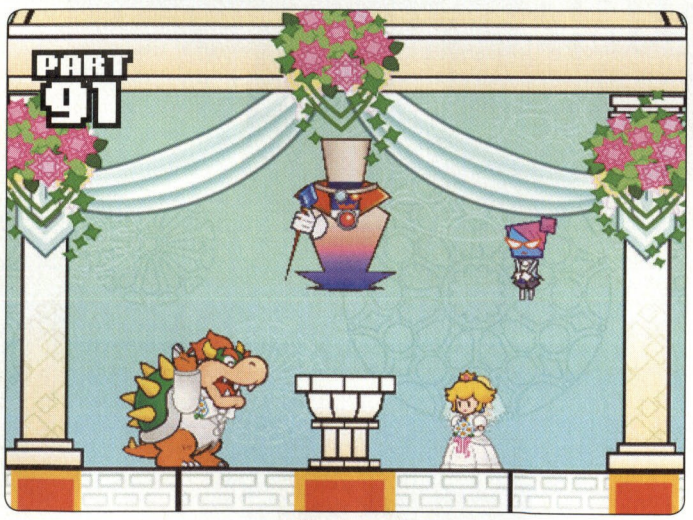
While the Korean fans may have gone wild, the worldwide reaction to the game's unveiling has been a bit more subdued. While many StarCraft players are overwhelmed by the excitement of finally seeing a new instalment in their favourite RTS series, others are dismayed at the seeming lack of innovation that the preview footage has shown us thus far. After almost a decade the gameplay does look virtually identical to the previous StarCraft, and there are still only the same three races from the original game to choose from. However, Blizzard are promising that the races have been "overhauled and re-imagined", and that the game will deliver an "engaging, action-packed, competitive experience that StarCraft players and strategy gamers worldwide will enjoy".

We've got confidence in Blizzard's capabilities, so we'll give them the benefit of the doubt that StarCraft II will be more than just a graphical update. Keep your eye on this space for more on this game as it approaches.

Korea is addicted and Blizzard is the pusher

CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at *captionthis@next.com.au* with **Caption This Part 90** in the subject line.



Caption it!

GIGABYTES!

Korean PS3 Has Bigger Disk

And it looks like you won't be getting one...

In more news from South Korea it seems that Sony a gearing up to release a new version of their PS3 console in the country, with a hard-drive that adds a whole twenty gigabytes to the typical 60GB HDD available in the rest of the world.

The 80GB drive was announced by Sony Computer Entertainment Korea, and is being advertised on the company's consumer website for the price of 518,000 Korean Won, approximately $677 Australian dollars.

Sony have reportedly announced that they have no plans to release a similar PlayStation 3 with an upgraded hard drive outside of Korea, instead saying that in the future the release of the 80GB consoles would be considered on a region-by-region basis.

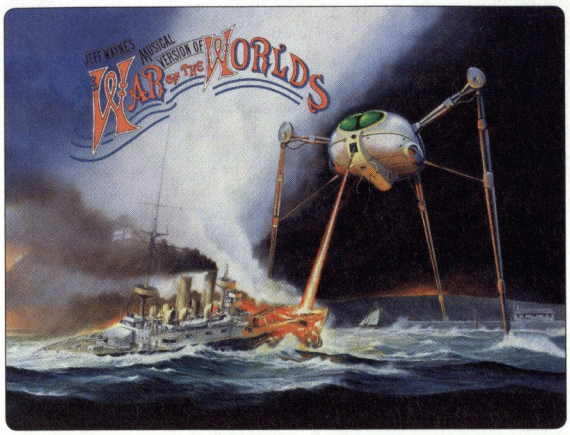
80GB means more copies of Super Rub-a-Dub

With the 20GB PS3 already discontinued in the United States, it seems likely that the unit will eventually be released there, but whether it makes it to Australia will be a case of wait and see.

ULLA!

Martians On Stage

Jeff Wayne recruits Shannon Noll to fight invaders



If you're a fan of science fiction, prog rock, stage musicals or all of the above, then you may have already heard that a live concert of Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of The War of the Worlds will soon be touring Australia.

Now, we know that this news has almost nothing to do with gaming (although there was a 1999 PlayStation and PC game based on the album); it's just that we think the concept of the show is completely awesome.

Jeff Wayne's 1978 album has always held some fascination for the collective Hyper team, whether it be getting scared witless by it when we were kids, or listening to it again as adults and realising that it one of the most rocking examples of audio narrative ever made.

Wayne himself will conduct the band, while Justin Hayward (of the Moody Blues) and Chris Thompson (of Manfred Mann) will lend their vocals to songs like "Forever Autumn" and "Thunder Child".

In an interesting move some local performers, including Shannon Noll, Rachael Beck and Michael Falzon have also been included in the cast.

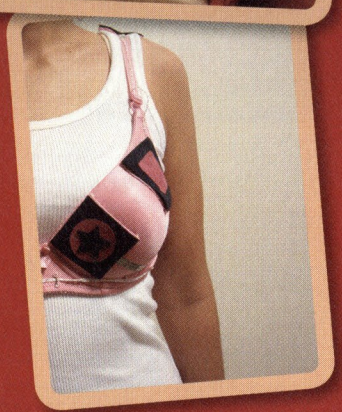
Noll fills the role originally performed by Thin Lizzy's front man Phil Lynott, while Rachael Beck, who (quite amusingly) played the older daughter in Hey Dad, is the Parson's wife. Michael Falzon, who recently performed in Ben Elton's We Will Rock You, stars as the Artilleryman.

If you want to go as much as we do: check out ***www.thewaroftheworlds.com.au*** for more info.

TEH BEWBS!

Gamers Get Intimate

Brings new meaning to the words joy stick



One of the most bizarre snippets of gaming news this month was the invention of one Jennifer Chowdhury. An engineering student at New York University, Chowdhury came up with an intriguing project for her thesis – a game controller built into her underwear.

The device is called the "Intimate Controller" and according to its creator it allows games to be controlled by players physically touching one another.

"The goal of this project was to research and create objects that challenge the traditional notions and orientation of video game play." Says Chowdhury. "The audience is people in relationships who want to experiment with a combination of game play and intimacy."

There are two controllers, one for a man and the other for a woman. The woman's is a bra with six game buttons, or sensors, while the man's is a pair of boxer shorts also with six sensors. Using these sensors the couple can play videogames by groping at each other's bodies, something that could potentially make even the most poorly designed game rather exciting.

If it had some motion sensitivity as well we might be tempted to call it the SEXAXIS controller, but that would be terribly juvenile, so we won't.

[above] With this, Pirates of the Caribbean 3 might even be fun

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Winners!

HYPER 163

GOD OF WAR II
Spartaaaa
- Anthony Harrap, Maida Vale, WA
- Andre Awadalla, Yarraville, VIC
- Luke Eller, North Gosford, NSW
- Anne Humphries, Narrogin, WA
- A. Minnikin, Eagleby, QLD

TMNT
Ninja Rap
- Natalie Axo, Angaston, SA
- Simon Greenfield, Gladesville, NSW
- Deano Worthington, Croydon, Vic
- Dong Do, Georges Hall, NSW
- Thomas Humphries, Narrogin, WA

SONIC
It's A Secret
- Nicholas Archer-Scott, Bongaree, QLD

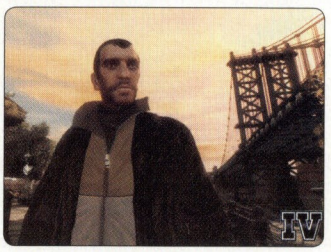
ALTEC
All The Way To Eleven
- Gene De Baer, SA (FX 5051)
- Sean Zollia, Urangan, QLD (FX 4021)

ADULT SWIM DVDs
Swimmin
- Shane Lees, Somerset, Tas
- Mitch Osborne, Carindale, Qld
- Jamie Galea, Taylors Lakes, Vic
- Tim Byrne, Tamworth, NSW
- Ben Hughes, Monash University, Vic
- Matthew O'Brien, Guildford, NSW
- Nic Finger, Launching Place, Vic
- Christopher Rosiak, Yellow Rock, N.S.W.
- Seb Tiburzio, Belair, SA
- Jamie Campbell, Hawthorne, QLD

DUFFEL!

GTA IV Gets Special Edition

Now comes with stuff you never knew you wanted



Following the lead of many of today's top-tier games, Rockstar North's Grand Theft Auto IV will be made available in a limited special edition package. This special edition will include a variety of GTA IV-branded merch along with your copy of either the Xbox 360 or PS3 version of the game.

The package will come in a metal tin, designed to resemble a safety deposit box, complete with a real working lock. Thankfully the keys to the lock will also be supplied, along with a GTA IV key ring, an art book filled with conceptual and promotional artwork from the game, as well as an exclusive soundtrack CD that won't be available anywhere else.

The entire package will fit inside the safety deposit box, and in turn, the box will fit inside a Rockstar-branded duffel bag, which will also be included in the package.

So far there's no word on whether the pack will be available outside the USA, but we'd say it looks pretty hopeful that the special edition will be around for the game's Australian launch, presently expected to be the same date as the European release of October 16, 2007.

The American price of the special edition is rumoured to be US$89.99, which at the current exchange rate equates to about AU$109.99. Knowing the ridiculous retail price of Australian games though, you can expect the local price to be a lot higher than that.

SAMUS!

Metroid Prime 3 Gets Dated

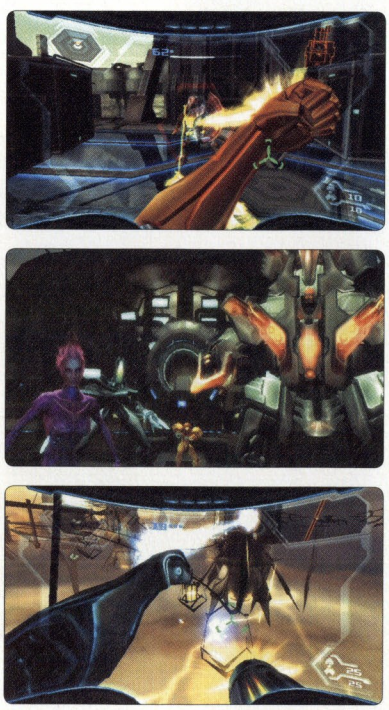
And a few other games are coming to Wii as well...

As anyone who owns a Wii will tell you, the system can be great fun – but there's just not enough games for it. Nintendo looks to be attempting to rectify this problem by finally announcing a real release date for one of the system's most anticipated games, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, along with a number of other first and third party games that will release within the year.

Metroid will come out in North America on August 20, 2007, and we'd expect the local release to be close behind. Prior to this announcement it was rumoured that Metroid would not release until early 2008, so the game's new date, less than three months away, is certainly a welcome surprise.

The other big names on the list include the Nintendo-themed soccer sim, Mario Strikers Charged, which is set to release in North America on July 30, and Battalion Wars 2, which is expected sometime during September. The biggest third-party games on the list included EA's Madden and Tiger Woods 2008, as well as Activision's Dave Mirra BMX Challenge, all of which look to release in August.

There's still no concrete dates for either Super Mario Galaxy or Super Smash Bros. Brawl, but at least the Wii is getting a few of the games that it really needs.



With Samus, Mario Strikers and Battalion Wars on the way, the infamous "Wii drought" may finally be over.

OVERFLOW

The latest instalment in the Guitar Hero phenomenon has just been given a few extra tracks, and its official name. Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s is the games full title, and Activision were willing to reveal that there will be thirty new songs from the titular era making it into the final game. Among these songs will be Skid Row's "18 and Life", "Nothing But a Good Time" by Poison, "Synchronicity II" by Police, as well as tracks from Faster Pussycat, Billy Squier, Extreme and Eddie Money. The rest of the track list is yet to be revealed, but since Activision have already announced that "I Ran" by Flock of Seagulls and "I Wanna Rock" by Twisted Sister will be in the game – we're already satisfied.

Capcom have recently announced that they will be closing down another of their subsidiary game studios. This time the developer is Flagship, who worked on several Nintendo/Capcom cooperative projects, including The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap for the Game Boy Advance. The announcement comes after a number of other high-profile Capcom subsidiaries had been absorbed back into the company, including Studio 8 (Final Fight: Streetwise) and Clover Studios (Viewtiful Joe, Okami, God Hand). The reason given for the studio closures is believed to be that Capcom wants to "streamline" its business model, and although the studio names will no longer be in use, none of the staff have been made redundant, and will instead simply continue to develop games under the Capcom name.

Anyone trying to log on to the Halo 3 Beta via their copy of Realtime World's Crackdown may have experienced some difficulty getting into the game at the promised date and time of May 16, 5:00am, Pacific Daylight Time.

While all other Beta testers were allowed access to the game on the dot, anyone attempting to use their Crackdown invite to download the game was out of luck. Due to a software error, the game would not give up its Beta goodness to thousands of anticipative Halo fans. The situation soon became an Internet riot, with irate gamers spamming every Xbox 360 message board they could find, calling for Bungie's blood.

About seventeen hours later, and the Crackdown invites finally came good, thanks to a patch issued by Microsoft that fixed the problem. As a kind of apology for the delay, Bungie have extended the length of the Beta test by four days, until June 10.

PRESS PASS

DANIEL STAINES

Trust Me!

Reading through the Hyperactive Hotseat forum the other day, I was struck by the cynical and often downright hostile tone of many of the questions contained therein. Are these the sort of questions gamers want to ask developers? And more importantly, are these the sort of questions that we in the gaming press should be asking more often?

If you've been on an internet gaming forum in the last few years, you'll know how little most hardcore gamers trust the specialist gaming press, both online and in print. Most of the time, the reason for said antipathy is more or less a grand conspiracy theory based on what boils down to a difference of opinion: Publication X gave Game Y a bad review even though I like Game Y very much, therefore all game critics are corrupt shills. Obviously I'm exaggerating for effect, but you know the sort of reasoning I'm talking about. You've probably engaged in it yourself from time to time. It's natural – people always demonise those they disagree with. Even over matters as trivial as videogames.

But in a lot of cases the distrust runs deeper than that. To steal a line from the very excellent Achewood, there is a general perception amongst hardcore gamers that the games press has as much balls as a carrot listening to violin music. We don't ask the sort of questions that I saw in the Hotseat forums. Outside of the occasional negative review, we generally don't confront developers with their poor choices, nor do we push them to speak to us – and by extension, to you – like human beings and not marketing robots. But how come?

It probably won't surprise you to learn that politics and time are the main culprits. Almost every developer interview you read in magazines like this one is arranged and mediated via a silent third party whose job it is to ensure said developer receives the most positive media coverage possible. These parties (which can consist of many people in a variety of different positions) act like gatekeepers: they scrutinise interviews for negative implications, and reject or dodge those questions that could potentially result in their products being portrayed as less than perfect. And we game critics, desperate to get all our work done on a deadline, play right into this by asking questions that we know are likely to get answered quickly and clearly. Basically, we avoid rocking the boat because we don't want to drown when it comes time to go live or send our pages to print.

So far as I can see, the end result of the process described above is usually the same: lightweight content that undermines its own credibility in favour of unanimous optimism. And that's a terrible shame, because the prevalance of said content ultimately weakens exactly that which we're all striving to establish - trust. I'm not saying that you can't trust anything you read in the games press, but I do understand why you might think that's the case. My hope is that the industry as a whole can address this issue before it's too late. We're critics - perhaps it's time we became a little more critical.

Until next month,

daniels@next.com.au

BAD COP NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

Extreme Makeover

Why is it then that every second announcement for games at the moment seems to be of a remake of an earlier game? In the last two months alone we've had announcements for, releases or review of games such as Ninja Gaiden Sigma, a remake with a face lift of a game 3 years old that has already been remade once, Tomb Raider Anniversary, a remake of a game 11 years old, Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, a PS3 remake of Escape from Butcher Bay, Impossible Mission, a straightforward remake with a face lift of a game 23 years old, Resident Evil 4 being remade for the Wii, another Pokemon game that adds nothing to the gameplay (I'm classifying it as a remake rather than a sequel as it adds nothing but a few more monsters, many of which appear to be the same) and probably countless more that I've forgotten due to a complete lack of interest. What I want to know is why should we be excited by the prospect of being able to play something we've already played before on a different format? Surely developers don't think that a simple face lift for a new platform is enough to get people all moist about a product they've already seen. They have a little more respect for us than that. At least I hope they do.

Unfortunately it looks as though we are complicit with their schemes to release their old stuff again and again. Take, for example the recent announcements of two rather huge sequels and what was shown to the general public in these announcements. Halo 3 is, without hyperbole, going to sell an incredible number of units. There is almost no way it can't be a huge success. When the beta was announced we hoped we'd see something new, something interesting, a reinvigoration of the franchise. What we got was three levels that aside from the hilariously named "man-cannon" and some high resolution textures are all but indistinguishable from the maps in Halo 2 multiplayer. People are still eating it up and singing praises. Now take a look at the very recent announcement by Blizzard for StarCraft 2 – nine years on they announce a sequel and show footage that is all but indistinguishable from the original game aside from the graphics overhaul. Once again people are eating it up. In nine years all that seems to have been done is a new look – at least that's what the footage tells you. There could be tons of gameplay differences in the final game but Blizzard has chosen to show the sequel as all but identical to the first game. There can be only one reason for this – they know what the audience clamours for – remakes and more of the same - comfort, not challenge, familiarity, not exploration.

Next time we complain about the lack of innovation in games we have to look first at ourselves – if any of us stood up and cheered for any of the above games all we're doing is perpetuating a disappointing trend.

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Tom Clancy's EndWar

DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT SHANGHAI**
PLATFORM: **PS3/XBOX 360**
GENRE: **RTS**
DUE: **FEB 2008**

"They never said Paris was like this in the brochure..."

Traditionally console RTS games have, for want of a better word, sucked. A gamepad just isn't a precise and fast enough control scheme to keep up with the demands of controlling hundreds of troops, building, repairing and resource gathering. Upon hearing that the new Tom Clancy game, EndWar was, in fact, an RTS we were initially a little worried. Granted, the game is being headed up by Aussie Michael de Plater, a man who has proven his worth in the Total War franchise and the game is being developed at Ubisoft Shanghai but the fear remained. Remained until we had a chance to talk to de Plater at a recent Ubisoft press event in San Francisco that is. After telling him our fears for a console RTS game, Michael de Plater quickly set us straight; "We started with the idea of console in mind so we really started from the ground up. It's Tom Clancy, a real World War scenario as well, so there was never going to be any struggling for resources, building factories or building more tanks. In a way it made it a lot like Total War – you have what you begin the battle with and you have to use tactics to defeat the enemy. A lot of the principles of warfare are the same – tanks are heavy cavalry, helicopter gunships are light cavalry, infantry with rocket launchers are a lot like spearmen."

"Sports games share a lot in common with strategy games... So we used that model"

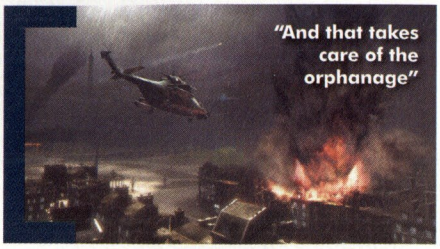
WAR, IT'S LIKE FOOTBALL

So where exactly do you start when putting together a console RTS from scratch? Oddly, according to de Plater you don't really look towards the genre: "One thing that we looked at and saw was that most FPS games, the innovations they are putting into them are really strategic; squad commands, air-strikes, vehicles, objective based maps. Looking at that we thought, OK, we can create this realistic war game but instead of having a dozen guys running around on the battlefield we can have a thousand." Another similarity de Plater points out is the congruence sports games have with strategy, "Sports games share a lot in common with strategy games – you directly control one guy and the other guys, thanks to their AI, behave in context in what should be an intelligent way and use the correct tactics. So we used that model as well. In our game you can control one guy or a group of guys, like a platoon of tanks and the others are smart enough to follow high level orders." While this may sound like something of a simplistic approach to an RTS control scheme it definitely makes sense to us. A specific example given to us with regards to EndWar was, of all things, Madden. In Madden you first choose your overall strategy and then modify it on the fly during the actual execution. It's a simple approach and offers a good deal of tactical depth.

FINGER ON THE BUTTON

So how exactly does this control scheme work? Well, before getting into the meat of the control system, de Plater pointed out that sometimes you need to rethink classifications, "We are real-time and we are strategy but we are a war game. There are many very good control options on console – just not on RTS games." That said the Creative Director of EndWar launched into a brief overview of the control system proper, "Our game works with context sensitive commands – like GRAW or Ghost Recon. Send a group to a location and they will do what is contextually right at that place. Send them to cover and they will dig in. Send them to a door and [continued p.14]

EndWar


"And that takes care of the orphanage"

Wow, what a beautiful looking city... BOMB IT!!!

[cont. from 12] they will kick it in and garrison the building. You're always in a third person view so you can see what is going on and make these decisions. The interface for all units is the same. Helicopters are quite low to the ground so are controlled much like ground units and air-strikes are attacks." I don't know about you but that sounds damn good to us; persistent troops with context sensitive and intuitive commands. Choose a unit and send them where you want them to go, the AI making them perform different roles depending on the context, allowing players to pay more attention to the strategy than to the real-time aspect of the game. There shouldn't be any Zerg rushing here (thank god). If clicking on a platoon or unit doesn't sound intuitive enough for you, de Plater had another little tid bit for us. "Because the headset is nearly standard issue with all Xbox players you can actually play the whole game with voice command. You can literally play the whole game by giving orders to your whole group."

So now that we know how the game controls, how does it actually work? Is there a linear story to work through, set missions with set objectives, different commanders you play throughout the campaign? Apparently the answer is no to all of the above. As Michael de Plater put it, "The game actually starts at the beginning of the war. You choose your faction and determine how the war goes. It's not a linear story – it's on the campaign map and the outcome of each battle decides what happens next. We have three factions but you can only play one at a time. You see a faction through to the end of the story." What's more, it doesn't appear that players will be taking the role of any specific general or war leader "Your character, in a way, is your army. You choose the name, the symbol, the logo, the motto, how to upgrade the troops and weapons."

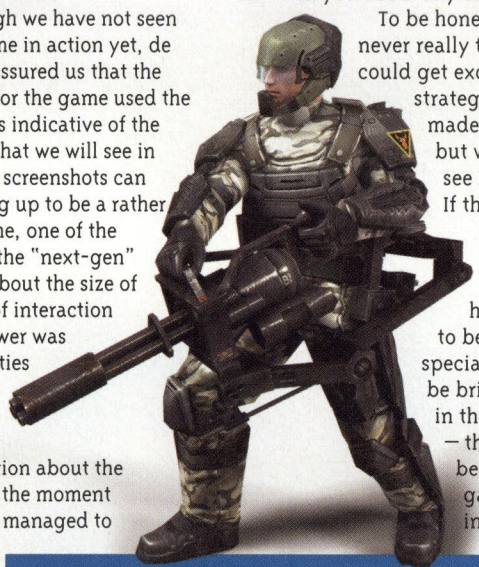
"It's not a linear story... the outcome of each battle decides what happens next"

It's the space race all over again...

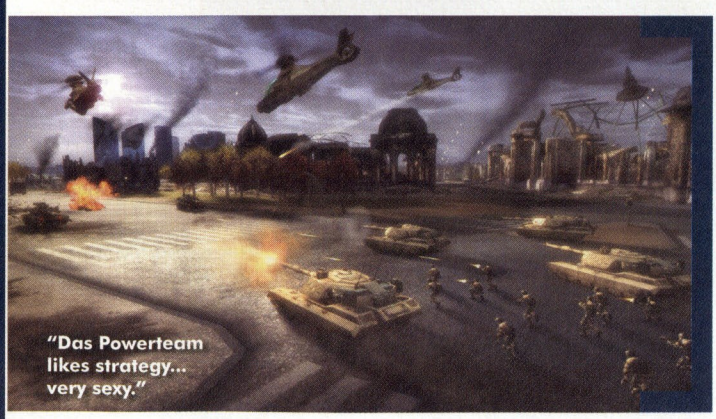
ALL OUT WAR

Although we have not seen the game in action yet, de Plater assured us that the trailer for the game used the in-game engine and was indicative of the look and level of detail that we will see in the final product. As the screenshots can attest, EndWar is shaping up to be a rather spectacular looking game, one of the few currently worthy of the "next-gen" tag. We asked Michael about the size of the maps and the level of interaction with the terrain. His answer was brief but telling, "The cities are pretty big. Every building is garrisonable and destructible."

There is little information about the multiplayer available at the moment but here's what we have managed to dig up. Players will have access to the three playable factions from the single player mode, the Americans, Russians and Europeans (presumably the Asian nations will be allied with one of the three factions – China will probably be with Russia and Japan with Europe). Multiplayer will accommodate up to 12 people but rather than having 12 full armies fighting against each other players will instead choose an allegiance to one of the factions and take control of part of that army. As well as all out war, multiplayer will feature numerous game modes with different objectives and rule sets. Unfortunately we can't tell you about any of them at this stage.



To be honest the Hyper crew never really thought they could get excited by a console strategy game that wasn't made by Nippon Ichi but we can't wait to see EndWar in action. If the controls are as clever and intuitive as the developers hope then EndWar has the potential to be something really special. We'll definitely be bringing you more in the coming months – there's a lot of time between now and the game going to retail in February 2008. <<


"Das Powerteam likes strategy... very sexy."

The War to End All Wars (again)

It seems like we have had a few too many wars to end all wars to allow the phrase to have any real meaning. Aside from the two World Wars, there have been many others that were prophesied as ending all wars, going back to the Punic Wars. OK, that was a lot of Wars in one sentence. What am I driving at with all this war talk? Well, EndWar is set in the near future – around 2020 – and proposes another War to End All Wars, this time brought about by a lack of resources (namely oil). Satellite defence systems are such that nuclear Armageddon is next to impossible so a new cold war and arms race has started. As they must, the cold war soon turns hot and the three most powerful factions, Russia, America and Europe start butting heads. Sounds like a good hook for some military shenanigans to us.

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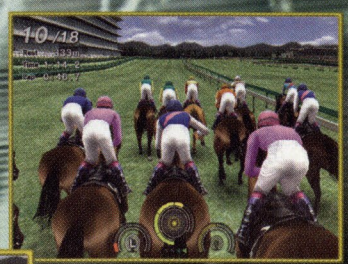

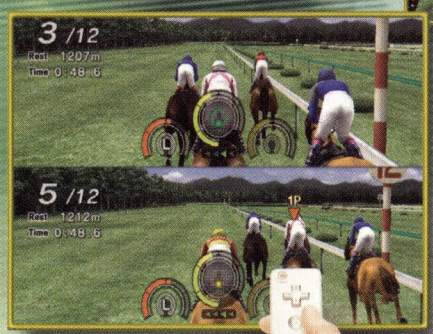

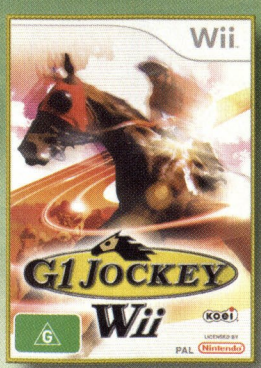

The Wii Remote is your whip and the Nunchuk your reins. Experience real jockey action with a variety of realistic controls, including whipping your horse with your right hand while you drive it on with your left.

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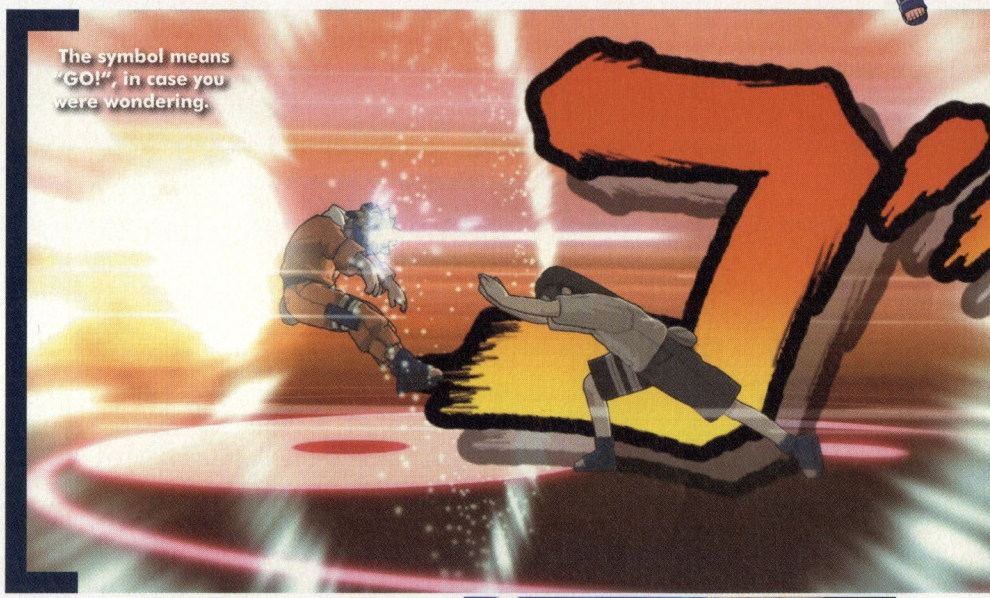
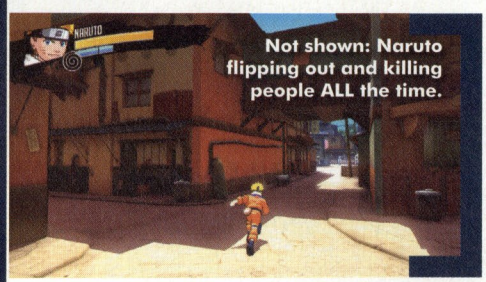
Rise of a Ninja Naruto

DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL**
PLATFORM: **XBOX 360**
GENRE: **ACTION**
DUE: **OCTOBER 2007**



Recently we went to San Francisco to see the upcoming line-up of Ubisoft titles. In all honesty we were expecting to be wowed by Hyper favourite, Assassin's Creed, EndWar and maybe Haze. When we heard that yet another game based on the currently highly popular Naruto brand would be on display we were anything but excited. By and large the vast majority of games based on Anime franchises have been rather poor, more of a cash in on an already existing market than a real game. Of course, seeing the game was being made by Ubisoft Montreal filled us with a little hope but we were still a little dubious – even the best development houses have missteps; witness Resident Evil: Dead Aim from Capcom or Grabbed by the Ghoulies by Rare. This all sounds ominously like the introduction to the EndWar preview but the feeling for both games was the same when we first heard of them. Worry.

Again it turned out that we were worrying for nothing. If anything, Naruto turned out to be one of the real highlights of the show. Players take the role of the titular Ninja-in-

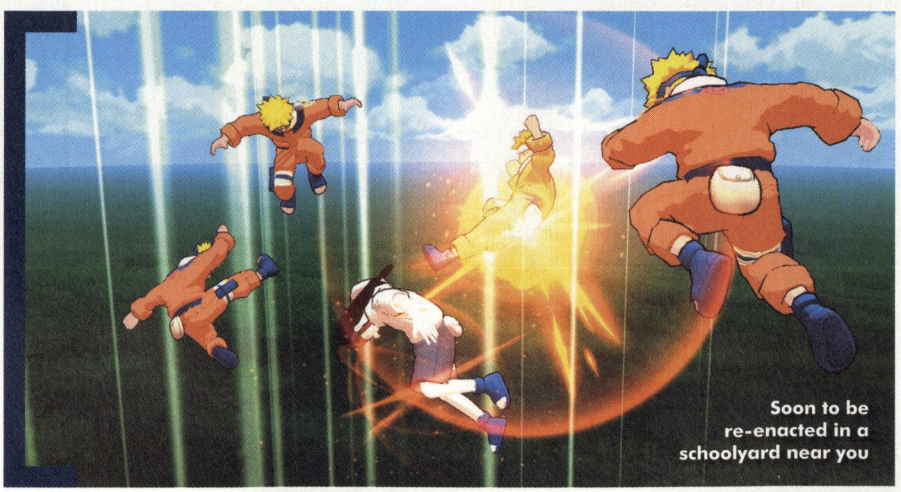


Training, Naruto, a rather loud-mouthed and belligerent young man whose body harbours a rather dreadful curse – his body is the prison for a demon that once almost laid waste to his village. You'd think that the poor boy being used as a prison for an evil demon that nearly killed everyone in Konoha would be reason enough to treat Naruto kindly but such is not the case. The boy is shunned and outcast. The role of the player is to perform quests for the people around town to increase your social standing so you can in turn be taught more and more interesting/useful ninja skills. It's a fairly simple premise but one that looks as though it will lead to a great amount of varied gameplay.

SHO KUSHOGI EAT YOUR HEART OUT

From what we saw of the demo, players are free to explore the town of Konoha. Not having ever seen the anime before we can't vouch for the fact but the developers assure us that it's an almost perfect replica of the town from the manga and anime – with a few slight changes to make it more fun to explore. As Naruto increases his social standing and thus his ninja skills, new movement options are sometimes unlocked – such as the ability to run up vertical surfaces – opening up new avenues for exploration and questing.

While we didn't see a whole lot of the game in action, aside from running around town we were demonstrated a nifty fast transit game that allows Naruto to travel to quest objectives very quickly as well a examples of the one on



What We'd Like to See:
A game based on Gantz (that isn't hentai)

one fighting. After learning the ability to run up vertical surfaces, Naruto also learns how to jump from tree branch to tree branch to get to distant locations quickly in a mini-game that revolves around the player simple choosing the direction (left or right) of the next jump, the timing getting faster as the ninja gains more momentum after consecutive successful jumps. Over all the game came across as little more that a substitute for a load screen but a rather enjoyable one at that.

While fighting, players build up their ninja powers, enabling them to bust out highly damaging attacks

WHERE'S MICHAEL DUDIKOFF?

Ninjas wouldn't be much good if they didn't fight and there seems to be a good deal of fighting in Naruto, backed up by a rather impressive looking fighting engine. From what we've seen so far, major conflicts will be resolves in a one-on-one fighting game style, each character facing off from a different side of an arena and battling it out over a few rounds, Street Fighter style. While fighting, players build up their ninja powers, enabling them to bust out highly damaging pressure point attacks when the meter fills. Performing actions with both thumbsticks triggers these attacks. What is interesting is that rather than simple triggering the special move when you perform the thumbstick gymnastics correctly, Naruto instead switches the game to a kind of first person view in which the player has to target and hit pressure points on the opponents body within a time limit. The number of pressure points hit translates into the amount of damage done when the move is finally triggered.

We haven't seen all that Naruto has to offer as yet but as it stands the mix of exploration and fighting game style combat is looking mighty appealing, even for people not familiar with the anime. We here at the Hyper bunker are definitely looking forward to seeing the final code in October – Naruto is looking like it could be the Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay of the anime world, the game that can give anime adaptations some real respect. <<

Neji certainly does seem to be copping a beating

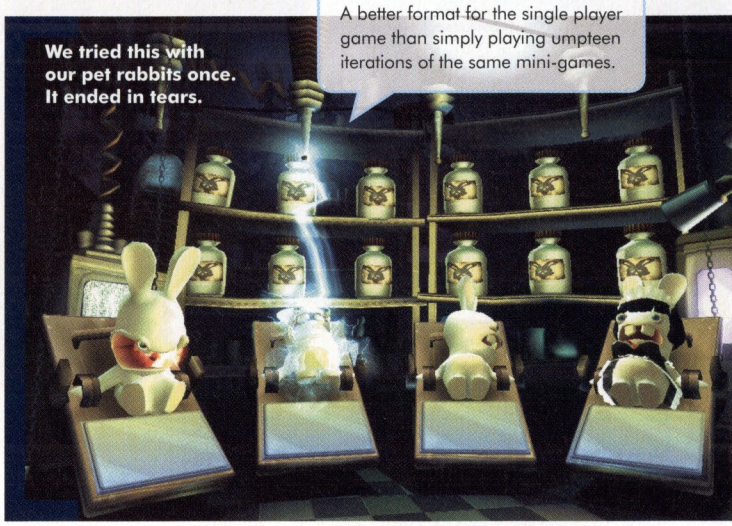
The verb, to Ninj

Although we haven't seen anything of multiplayer the developers have assured us that it will play an integral role in the final game. At this stage we know that the one on one fighting will be part of the multiplayer experience, with players choosing from a wide range of characters from the Naruto universe and beating the crap out of each other. Aside from that there is no word on any other multiplayer modes, though we wouldn't be surprised if the tree jumping travel mini-game has some sort of multiplayer race element to it.

RAYMAN Raving Rabbids 2

DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT PARIS**
PLATFORM: **Wii, DS**
GENRE: **PARTY**
DUE: **NOVEMBER 2007**

What We'd Like to See:
A better format for the single player game than simply playing umpteen iterations of the same mini-games.



While the original Raving Rabbids was a game long on charm and humour, it was also a game fairly short on fun. The idea of the party games in the original release was good but the problem was that a good number of them required players to take turns, slowing down the overall pace of the game and even more were kind of ill-conceived, going on for far too long or alternately being only a few seconds in duration. So far we've only played four of the 60 odd mini-games that will make up Raving Rabbids 2 but we can categorically tell you that this is shaping up to be a much better game. Why? Well, the games appear to be better thought out, there's a real competitive atmosphere with three of the four games featuring all of the players on screen at once and the players now choose Rabbid avatars. Rabbids are awesome. Especially when dressed as Darth Vader.

This game was simple but a lot of fun to play, delivering enough variation to keep it amusing from beginning to end

NEEDS A SAMMICH

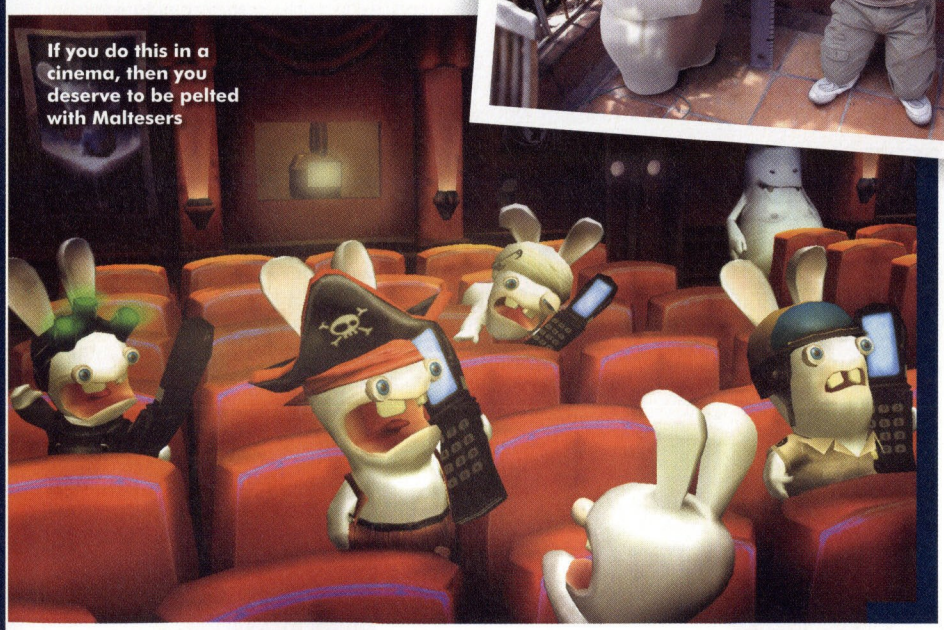
The first game we played saw the rabbids as waiters, serving huge, teetering sandwiches to a fat bunny at the end of a balcony, trying to make it to his table with as much sandwich on the plate as possible. Players hold the wiimote normally, tilting it left, right, forward and back to move and balance the plate. The A button stops all movement. Each successful sandwich delivery increases the size of the next sandwich the player has to deliver. With four players trying to deliver their food at the same time the stage got very hectic, especially when we discovered that you can deliberately bump into other players and send them flying off the edge.

BATTER UP

The next game we played was a baseball analogue that first sees the player shaking the wiimote and nunchuck up and down rapidly to get a run-up, hitting the button at the right time to launch and then swinging the wiimote to bat the rabbid into the distance. Of all the games we played it was probably the simplest but no less amusing at that. Although players took turns the rounds were fairly short so there was little in the way of down time.

LOOGIE

Then we played a game in which players have to shake the wiimote up and down to make their rabbid eat a carrot then tilt the wiimote from left to right to gain momentum on the rope of carrot flavoured spit to try and fling it into the cups of waiting rabbids who eagerly gulp the resultant goo down. It's a gross premise but definitely a challenging one. Of all the mini-games this was probably the worst we played but that is a relative term – when compared to the majority of the games in the original Raving Rabbids it was definitely more enjoyable.



BARE BACK

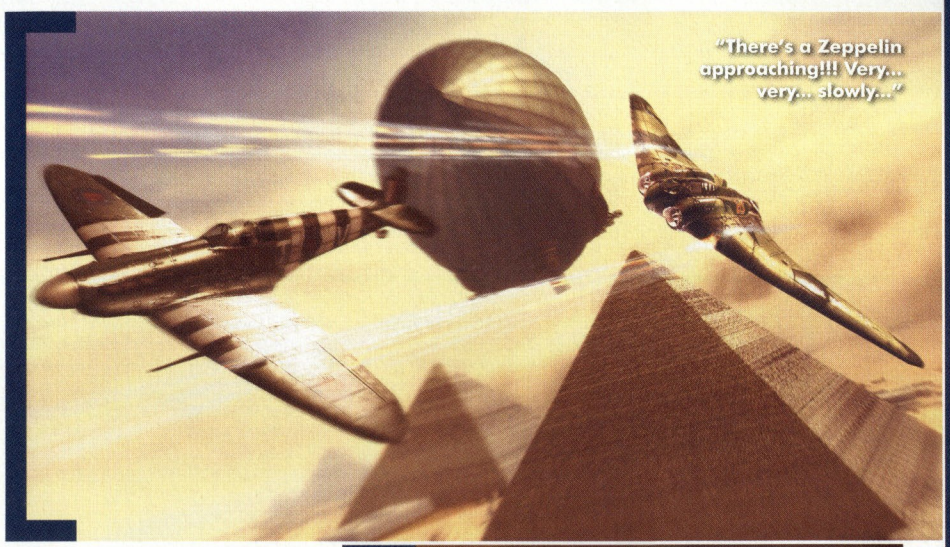
The final game we played saw the Rabbids sitting on mechanical bulls; on screen prompts displayed the action we had to perform with the wiimote at any given time, the speed that the prompts changed increasing as the mini-game progressed. Once again the execution of this game was simple but a lot of fun to play, delivering enough variation in control and hectic speed to keep it amusing from beginning to end.

Rayman Raving Rabbids 2 shows definite potential to greatly improve on the original game. If the quality of the other mini-games compares favourably to the four we have played so far then we should be in for a good time. More news as it comes. <<

Blazing Angels

THE SECRET MISSIONS

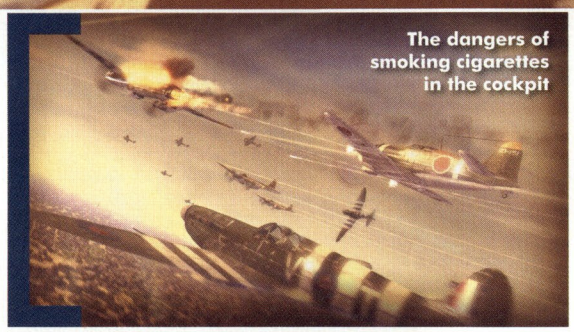
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT ROMANIA**
PLATFORM: **XBOX 360, PS3, PC**
GENRE: **ARCADE FLIGHT SIM**
DUE: **AUGUST 2007**



"There's a Zeppelin approaching!!! Very... very... slowly..."

To be honest the first Blazing Angels game was pretty dull. It wasn't a game that did anything in particular wrong but it didn't do anything particularly right either. It was almost the very definition of average. Playable but not memorable, mildly enjoyable but not particularly fun, Blazing Angels was little more than a blip on the gaming radar. Can Ubisoft Romania breathe new life into the series? From what we've seen and played so far the answer is veering towards yes.

The most important aspect of The Secret Missions, at least in our eyes, is hinted at in the title of the game. Instead of slavishly sticking to history for the setting, Secret Missions is just that, a game based around secret missions in WWII, fictional encounters with enemies in experimental, theoretical or fictional aircraft. While flying around in a spitfire is fun, flying around in an experimental canard design secret Allied jet plane shooting Nazis out of the sky with homing missiles is even better. This is what the game is about. The planes that were mentioned in rumours, appear on conspiracy theory websites or existed only as blueprints. As a setting for an arcade style combat flight sim it's a lot more appealing a premise than slavishly sticking to historical realism (in terms of the setting – we're pretty sure that Allied planes didn't get their ammo replenished by flying through shiny blobs left by exploding German and Japanese planes).



The dangers of smoking cigarettes in the cockpit

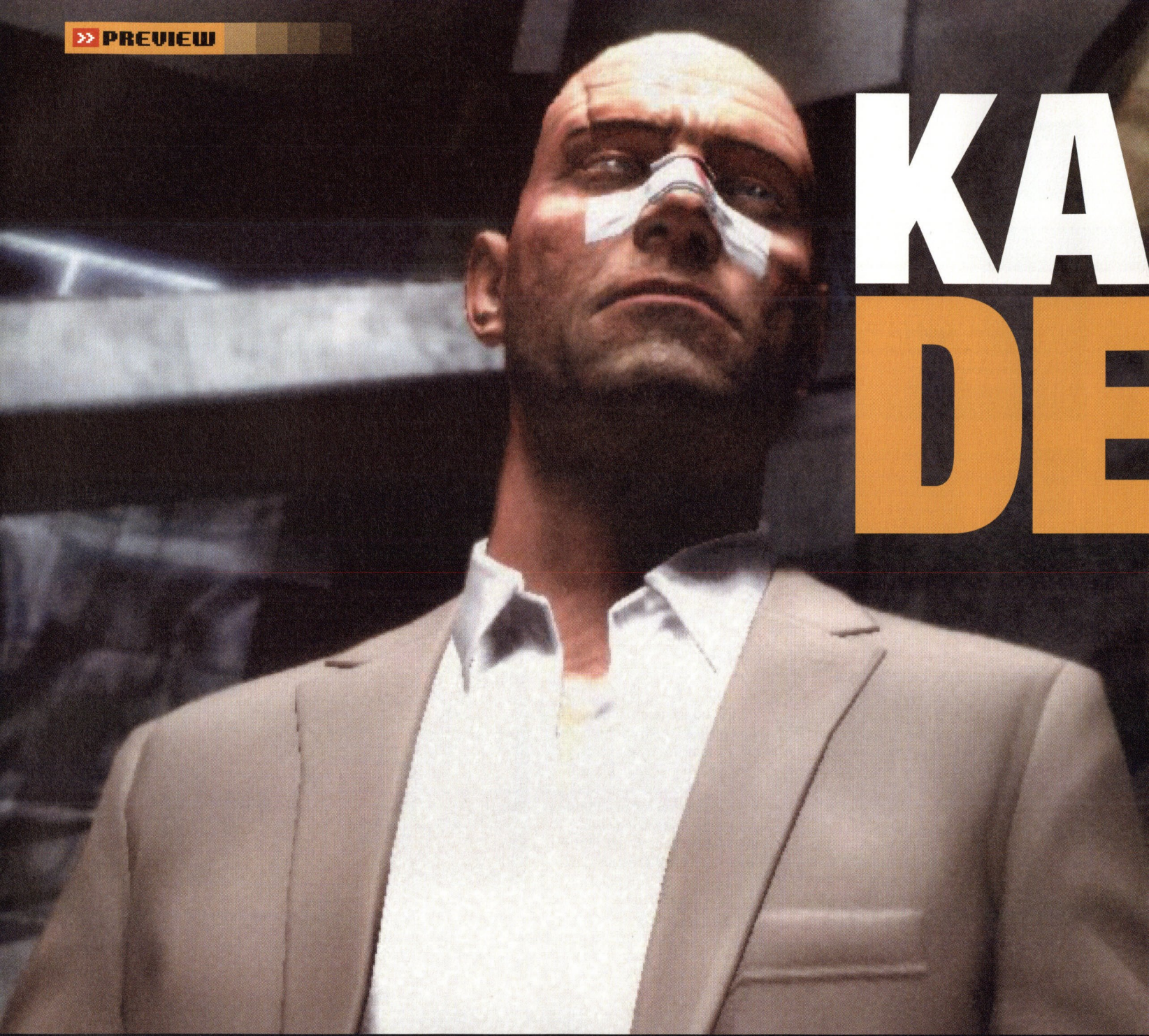
Most of the mechanics from the first game seem to remain fairly constant in the second outing – simple left thumbstick flight controls and right thumbstick throttle controls, upgradeable planes, a large variety of weapons to equip and upgrade and simple wingman controls. The graphics engine has been given a significant upgrade with some rather beautiful scenery and detailed aircraft fighting for centre of attention. Thankfully the horizon has been given a nice facelift as well; it's now quite beautiful, a fitting backdrop, unlike the rather dull blue of the first game.

What We'd Like to See:
More Zeppelins, the undisputed king of cool vehicles.

We're not sure where the code we played sits as far as completeness is concerned but it must be said that the game didn't feel particularly balanced. The level of difficulty jumped markedly from one mission to the next and some control problems manifested themselves repeatedly, the most crucial being the jerkiness of the targeting reticle that for some reason seemed to move with agonising slowness when you're trying to get a bead on an enemy plane but was almost impossible to keep on target. Giving the benefit of the doubt, these problems can probably be put down to debug code and a day of people fiddling with controller settings rather than the game itself.

Interestingly, in amongst the dogfights and bombing runs, sources have informed us that Blazing Angels: The Secret Missions will feature boss-style battles against giant warships, gun-toting Zeppelins and squadrons of other experimental craft. We didn't see any of these battles in action but we can't wait to check them out. <<

This scene would make Kenny Loggins proud



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Apparently the development crew over at IO struggle to restrain desires that could render great harm upon themselves and their surroundings; a small group of Journalists gathered around the world's largest TV being informed that the first of the two parts of Kane & Lynch: Dead Man we would get to play is actually based around the very building where IO's offices are based, hinting at their destructive inclinations. Whatever the building was doing in Tokyo, however, we have no idea. What we do know is that the team must work in a place so polished and slick that it almost represents a hybrid between a Clinic, a very large spiral staircase and a Mental Asylum: an impressive theatre stage for a shootout, at least, and an appropriate one for a game where one of the two leading protagonists is a totally deranged psychotic.

LYNCH? DAVID? MAYBE NOT

The two lead characters after whom the game is named – Kane and Lynch – appear, from what we've been able to grasp, to be very well thought out persons who have a good helping of back story. Both thrown into the game's scenario after having just been awaiting their respective fates on death row, it's rather evident that they're both going to have their share of problems: Kane has had issues with a past military career gone very wrong, while Lynch is a genuinely deranged psychopath.

Story is story and that's all good and fine, and we're not going to hold anything against Kane & Lynch being a part of the pool of games that aim to be story-driven, cinematic experiences – hell, we like to read some Murakami and watch a little Scorsese from time to time ourselves, and the appeal of influence is easy to understand. What we are going to do though, is show a disproportionate level of interest towards Lynch's unstable psyche, as it's the primary piece of the character back story that actually promises to become an interesting aspect of the gameplay itself.

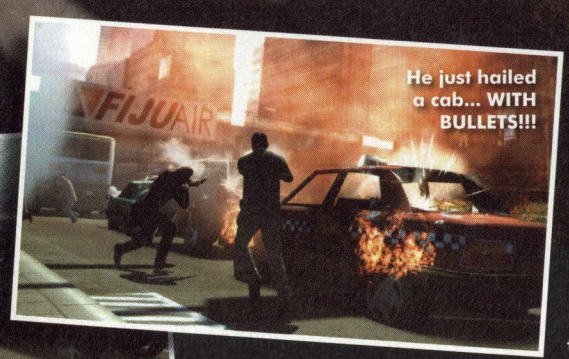
More than just a distorted face who laughs in discomforting ways while killing things in scripted cinematics, Lynch is also prone to killing things he's not supposed to, when his not supposed to, at any point during the actual game. He's a perfect metaphorical two-edged sword, a part of your team who can render great assistance if you play your cards right, or a loose cannon able to inflict a headache-worthy list of troubles should you allow yourself to become sloppy.

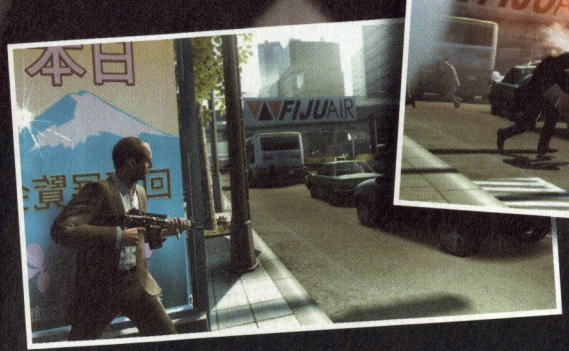
Full details and examples on exactly how this will work are yet to emerge, but what we do know is that this is a squad-based action game, and that Lynch has a very unique AI that sets him far apart from the rest of your team. While the rest of your team will follow orders happily, and if left alone generally focus on a mixture of the task at hand and trying to stay alive, Lynch is different. Lynch likes to shoot things, and if left unattended he will wander around quite casually blowing the heads off already dead people, or even shooting innocent bystanders should there be any around to conveniently take a bullet for his amusement. Keeping him close by, and making sure he received his medication will be the only way to keep him under any sort of control – exactly how often the medication will be administered and how it

BY TIM HENDERSON

NE&LYNCH
EAD MEN

SYSTEM: **PC, PS3, 360**
CATEGORY: **ACTION**
PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **IO INTERACTIVE**
DUE: **2007**





will be done is yet to be seen, but we're quite enthusiastic about the potential for a more spontaneous, out-of-control element in squad based combat. Will Lynch also show a fear of needles and need to be restrained at later points in the game? We can only speculate, but we're willing to have faith that IO will put Lynch's condition to some intriguing uses.

As for the rest of your squad, well, they're much more conventional. Command layouts have been kept very straightforward, and seem quite similar to that seen in Freedom Fighters. You can command your squad either as a whole, or as individual units, with orders for coming, going and opening fire all mapped neatly around the 360 (and now PS3) pad's face buttons – from what we played this seems to be all that is really needed, as the AI appears to be more than capable of filling in any blanks, which should help allow you to concentrate on keeping yourself alive and kicking some arse.

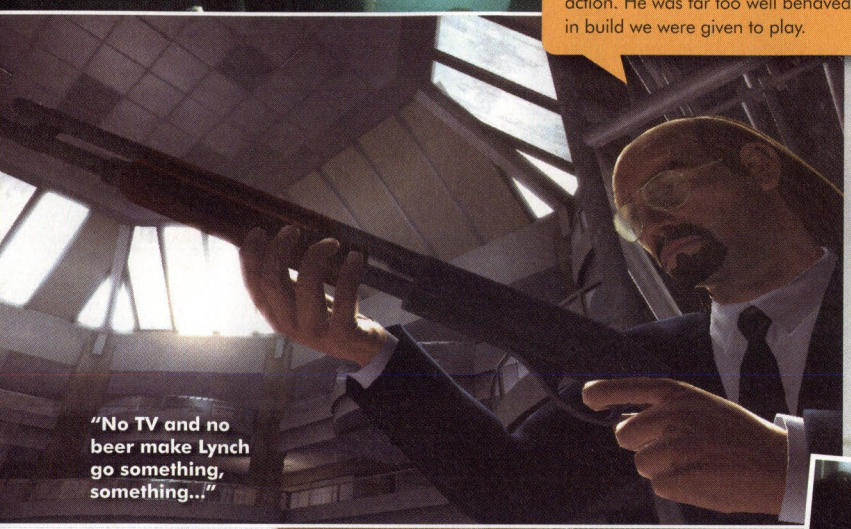
And keeping yourself alive is naturally of the greatest importance. Taking the role of Kane, players are effectively the head of the outfit, the lead character still sane enough to be allowed to be in command of a tight unit of soldiers. Should these comrades die you lose nothing but an extra pair of hands. However, an extra pair of hands is always welcome, as an extra pair of hands can go a long way towards keeping Kane and Lynch themselves alive. You can lose as many of your generic squad members themselves as you like without a visit to the menu screen, but should either Kane or Lynch blink out for good then players are packed into a cardboard box, taped in, slapped with a 'fragile contents' sticker and then shipped back first-class to the beginning of the mission.

STAYING ALIVE

Your squad mates will do more to keep you kicking than just shooting anyone who's shooting at you, though. Death isn't instantaneous, and should you blank out with a member of your team nearby, then it's very likely they will revive you so that you can continue on with your happy little massacre.

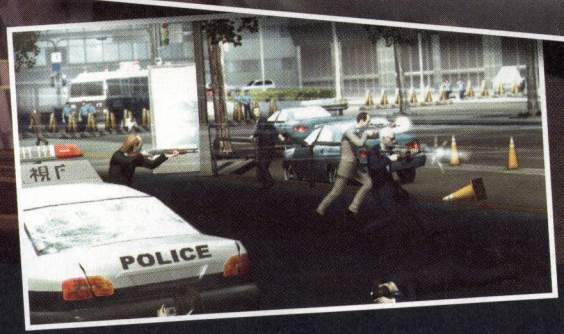
The actual implementation of loss of vitality and near-death moments is looking to be exceptional, and one of the better executions of cinematic influence in gaming we've seen to date. In a move that is a very welcome aspect of the game's presentation, IO have all but entirely removed on-screen icons. The state of your health is shown by an increasingly red tint on the screen, and an eventual tilt of the camera when things get really critical. Approach your deathbed and Kane will start having fuzzy, muddled flashbacks that pertain to the trauma that landed his life in this mess in the first place. It's every

What We'd Like to See:
Lynch's psychotic condition in action. He was far too well behaved in build we were given to play.



"No TV and no beer make Lynch go something, something..."

Ah, so this is how they filmed those episodes of Batman



bit as cinematic as IO would like to make out, and it works in perfect harmony with the gameplay as well; such graphical alterations being a welcome change from typical statistical representations, and one that goes a good way to build greater character empathy without interrupting the purpose of play.

Furthering the cinematic desires, camera control is also present in cutscenes. We feel a bit mixed here as while it's certainly a valid enough inclusion, claims of it keeping things interactive and immersive seem to be taken a bit far — it's still a good level shy of Half-Life's ability to allow players to retain full control of their Scientist avatar during such certain moments.

But enough of this — you should be asking just what we got to play. Well, we were given a chance to tackle a mission in Tokyo. It all started atop the aforementioned building reportedly based on Io's own office complex, wherein a peaceful moment was granted to adapt to the basic controls and command system. That done, and after gazing out over an appropriately blurred Tokyo cityscape (this is filmic presentation, after all), it was time to abseil down the side of the very glassy building. Humorously, in spite of a bunch of burly men with large firearms strapped to their backs dropping down in plain view, none of the building's occupants displayed the slightest sign of panic. We were reminded that the build we were playing was still a ways from being completed, and that those little people on the other side of the glass would react more appropriately in the final game. Then we shrugged and continued out descent.

Final destination found, window shattered into thousands of tiny fragments and guns pulled out, it was time to get into the grit for real. The duck and cover system worked intuitively for the most part. A little glitchy at times, perhaps, but it was easy to paint a mental image of how it would worked when finally ironed out, and we expect most players will find it to be second nature once it is. The firefight itself — despite the ease of aiming and ducking back behind a pillar — was a cathartic mess, and little surprise there as a look around what was once a pristine piece of posh office space showed dust, rubble and bullet-inflicted imperfections to be all over the damned place. That said, the general nature of the destructive environments seemed to be of a shell that you could shoot off the skeletal structure — be this a condition of the location we were shown, or an indication of the system at large we cannot yet tell. All the same, walking

> **"...SHOULD YOU BLANK OUT WITH A MEMBER OF YOUR TEAM NEARBY, THEN IT'S VERY LIKELY THEY WILL REVIVE YOU SO THAT YOU CAN CONTINUE ON WITH YOUR HAPPY LITTLE MASSACRE."**

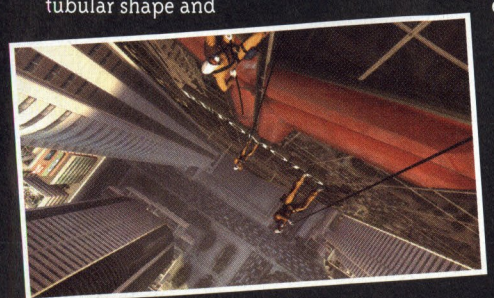
Got Health?

Kane & Lynch's approach to character health is something that we're quickly falling in love with. The lack of graphics or numbers adds a lot to the game's feel in itself, but thankfully the guys at IO have also realized that the old hat medkit system has perhaps overstayed its welcome in videogame land. The solution is the obvious one of simply allowing gradual regeneration, but coupled with the lack of statistical representations, it feels agreeably capricious, and goes a long way in allowing players to feel out how well their character's doing rather than reading over-precise screen readouts.

up to a corpse and capping it in the head did a satisfying job of blowing off a chunk of skull.

SCAR-FACED VANITY

Exiting from this room started to bring about some minor concerns about Kane & Lynch's visual merits. There's little doubting that the filmic presentation has been nailed very, very well, but it was hard to escape the sense that the building was perhaps a bit too... perfect. The tubular shape and layout worked very well for the gunfight scenarios, but before being shot to pieces the office block was inhumanly pristine, and more sterile than even the most efficient Hospital wards. The Eidos office where we played this was very swish in it's own right, but it still had a certain amount of character. Comparatively, the environments here looked perfect in a way that could only exist if people were allowed nowhere near them. It may be possibly that the destructible nature of the surroundings has come at the price of everything appearing excessively immaculate in initial form.



As it was, the overly clean aesthetic continued right onto the street, where the gameplay really heated up. Different types of cover provided different levels of protection – cars being especially risky shields, as enough firepower will trigger minor explosions that lead to not-so-minor injuries. It was a truly dramatic, even dynamic scenario, with a sense of chaos and scale that justifies the need for so-called 'next generation' hardware.

Concerns over some aesthetic merits put aside, Kane & Lynch is looking to be an absolute ripper of an action game. The balance between tactics and sheer, visceral thrills is spot on, and the desire to be cinematic, while hardly original, features execution that is easily a notch above the norm. The lack of screen icons and distractions is a big plus, and the way that Kane's health is at times tied to erratic flashbacks is inspired – the sort of small touch that displays proper consideration for the project's goals. We're promised a deep, mature plot to carry these two characters along, and if IO can pull their narrative strings correctly while maintaining the level of accessible chaos shown in the action so far, then they may have the classic status that Hitman has come so close to, but never quite reached, on their hands at long last. <<

AGE OF CONA

HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

SYSTEM: **PC, 360 (TBA)**
CATEGORY: **MMORPG**
PLAYERS: **MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **FUNCOM**
DUE: **2007**

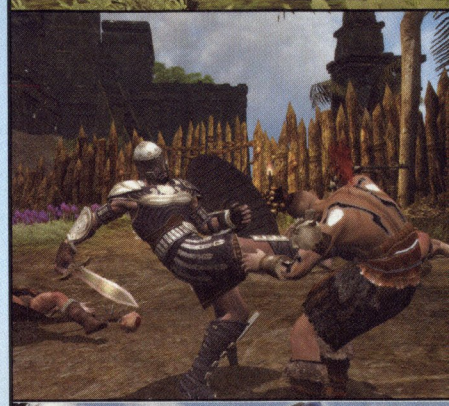
Once a fantastical glittering in a fanatical visionary's eye, an anti-pragmatic idea born from some nut in the middle of the desert who wanted to be able go on epic quests with other people but was unable to convince anyone to drive for nine hours to visit him, MMORPG's now seem to be twelve for ten cents. World of Warcraft has millions of players shelling out dosh to keep playing each month and has even earned a regular spot within our very own pages, but right now it's time to take a look at burly men dressed with loincloth and wearing funny beards instead.

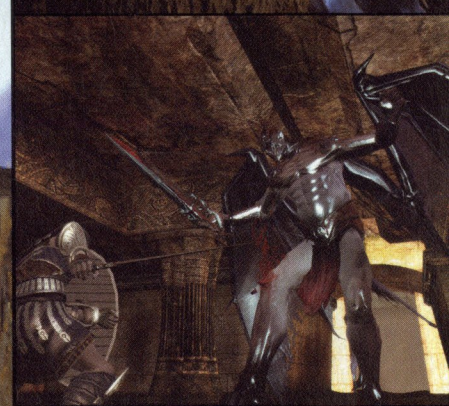
YES, ANOTHER

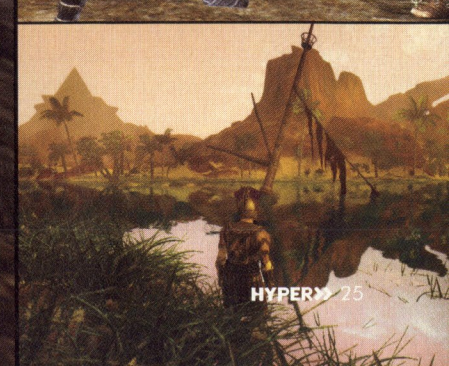
It all started with a fantasy license, apparently. The guys from Funcom were initially somewhat confused and bewildered – what could possibly be left for the pickings? Blizzard had long since established Warcraft as a powerhouse of a franchise, and Lord of the Rings was already taken – among other things, what possible license could be viable for a rich, detailed world for an online fantasy RPG?

"It was just so perfect," Content Designer Jason Stone revealed the night before the presentation, a flake of pasta from his lasagne threatening to burn the side of this mouth. His following checklist – movies, books, comics and mass merchandise – provided a foundation for his statement: Conan was the fantasy franchise in question, and Conan has certainly been underused in videogame land, especially considering the richness of its universe.

And a rich world looks to be what the team at Funcom have managed to piece together with their polygon and texture bricks and mortar; since the geographical space in Conan's online world of Hyboria looks to







by TIM HENDERSON

be massive. Not that we expected anything less these days, but the expanse of land here still looks to impress. Three entire countries are to be expected at launch, with more to potentially follow depending on the initial success and population of the game, and as things are at present, while the game is broken up into different 'zones' rather than being a completely open gameworld, each of these zones can still equate up to 4km each. This is a lot, something that was put into true perspective the following day when Funcom took a chance to zoom out a great distance until an entire island was in full view.

These lands, as well as being rather large, are also devastatingly pretty by MMO standards. Hell, they're pretty by any standard. There may be little denying that the technical merit of the visuals will pale in comparison to titles like Crysis (an unfair comparison point for almost any game), but within the online only market they're easily several notches above the norm. Textures are detailed, animations are diverse, and the locations are packed with foliage, rubble and whatever else may be appropriate for the scenery at hand. Everything we've seen has been smoothly modeled also, and there's a complete lack of those blocky edges still common in the likes of WoW.

Where the visuals are looking a little less admirable are in some aspects of the design itself. The consistency of the look, for all the detailed loveliness seems a little undercooked. Character models, in particular, look a little... Poser-ish. The more detailed, consciously realistic approach of the visuals may be to blame, but the present build makes it hard to eliminate the feeling that you're playing as a generic plastic doll dressed up in loincloth.

UGLY MAN CREATION SYSTEM

Character creation is looking very intricate, although it perhaps carries an amount of the Poser association with it; the kind of malleability on hand reminiscent of the famous 3D character-modeling tool. The positive aspect of this association, however, is that you can do a lot with the generic man you're given to turn into your ideal barbarian representation of self. There are three character types to choose from ('at launch', according to the two members of Funcom present for our playtime, hinting that more may well follow), and each of these can be meticulous adjusted in both body shape and facial structure – right down to broken noses should you so desire. Also expect the standard random generator tool for those who don't wish to spend what could potentially become hours getting their avatar to look just

What We'd Like to See:
User created content for skin colour and bling. Our character for the presentation was so close to being a perfect Mr. T lookalike that it was painful.

"Crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and hear the lamentation of their women"

right, which is what we lazily went for, eventually settling on a whiter incarnation of Mr. T after some truly wild freaks of nature. We're told that the generator will show a little more restraint in the final version.

The gameplay itself is looking to be defined by quests and combat. The Funcom team seem determined to make NPC's more than quest dispensers, and have made a point of including elements of banter with passers by and some actual dialogue in the presenting of individual quests themselves - a small touch, but still a welcome one for a game that will be single player for a while at first. Also worth noting is that more important dialogue actually features voiceover. However, it's the combat system that deserves the bulk of attention.

Regarding the combat in the game, Jason isn't afraid to admit that his influences have come from other, less MMO-friendly platforms: "the key inspiration has been the past few years of console games," he admits with a refreshingly receptive tone, "our melee combat was influenced by stuff like Dynasty Warriors, God of War, Ninja Gaiden and so forth". A mixture of such examples, and a desire to realise MMO battles that consist of more than generic attack animations and flashy spell effects has given rise to the visual interface known as the Combat Rose. The term Rose was born from the Rose of your typical compass, and is an obvious reference to the 360 degree nature of battles: the direction you face is of utmost importance in the online world of Conan, and attacks will be mapped out in different directions to take full advantage of this. It starts out simple, but apparently gets much more complicated, which should allow for some very creative slaying. It took us some time to get used to the system – a normal symptom, we're told – but there's no denying that we felt that little bit more in control of the encounters by the time our session came to a close. Certainly, being able to place a swing correctly and take down two or three foes with the one blow has a more satisfyingly physical sensibility that is typically missing from the genre. Add to this some simple timed combos that far easier to execute with keyboard commands rather than mouse, and combat as a whole is looking to be a new defining standard for online gaming, and perhaps PC role-playing titles in general. Our only concern being that the combos themselves felt a little sluggish, especially when thinking about the examples of influences provided.

It'll take a while to unleash the real fight potential though, as Conan is looking to provide a gentle curve when it comes to deciding just what type of character you wish to be. Picking your race for the initial, single-player portion of the game is just the tip of the sharp pointy object. You won't choose your basic archetype until you reach level 5, and your final class decision won't be confronting you until you hit level 20, which should allow plenty of time to get into the feel of just what you wish to commit to.

Reservations about some aspects of the visual design set aside, our attitude towards Conan is one of excitement. There's too much to cover here, and all of it is intriguing – especially the ability to build and defend castles, which is something we're really keen to see the final execution of rather than just hear about. But perhaps we should sum ourselves up by simply saying that this looks to be the definitive World of Warcraft alternative. <<

"EVERYTHING WE'VE SEEN HAS BEEN SMOOTHLY MODELED ALSO, AND THERE'S A COMPLETE LACK OF THOSE BLOCKY EDGES STILL COMMON IN THE LIKES OF WOW."

TIME FOR A CHAT

After all the effort we went to in order to sneak comments out of the Game's Content Designer, **Jason Stone**, while poking at some penne in an Italian Restaurant that actually seemed to be Portuguese, it turned out that we were supposed to wait until later, whereupon we were able to talk comfortably over a plate of cookies instead.

Conan seems a little more cinematic in presentation than your average MMO, what were the artist's main inspirations?

Jason: We borrowed quite a lot from movies, especially Braveheart. There are a lot of photos from that movie in the 'scrapbook'.

Hyper: You've spoken a lot about your melee combat and how it's set apart, but what of magic?

With spell effects, we're putting a lot of effort into trying to make them very visceral. Magic users are set apart too, as each one has a very unique presentation to their magic.

Hyper: As for the combat itself, it's taken a little adjusting...

That's totally common, but I think it gets more natural. We've found that MMO players get used to it quite quickly – around 5 or so kills, while others take a bit longer. But it does become intuitive.

Hyper: What type of community do you expect to grow around the game?

We hope that the maturity of the game will attract mature players, although that can't really be measured by age. Twats are the curse of the Internet and will naturally appear in MMO's, although consoles are even worse. Nothing but 13-14 year old kids who think they're thugs on Saints Row.

Hyper: Speaking of consoles, considering the combat influences is there any chance Conan will feature proper gamepad support for the PC?

Long before we were able to make the deal with Microsoft to let us bring Age of Conan to the 360 we saw it as having great potential for being played on a Next-Gen console. Because of this we have always had gamepad control in mind, and in fact almost the entire dev team has gamepads at their desk for this very purpose. The fact that we have had support for both keyboard/mouse and gamepad players in mind from the beginning in regards to control will definitely be apparent in the final game.

Thanks for the cookie

Always important to have a cookie

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Bioshock

SYSTEM: **PC, XBOX360**
CATEGORY: **FPS**
PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **IRRATIONAL STUDIOS**
DUE: **AUGUST 24**

After a good 20 hours in transit I'm in New York at a ritzy party. On stage is Irrational Studio's creative director, Ken Levine, and in the room around us are whirring machines sporting shiny copies of BioShock ... or at least the first few levels.

I can't wait to get my hands on this bad-boy. In case you missed the "what happened in last week's episode" BioShock is Irrational's spiritual successor to the cult classics System Shock 1 and 2. They combined shooter action, ducking and dodging, throwing bolts of electricity then switching from your plasmid-superpowers to wrench or revolver to finish your opponent. You see, things are designed to work together in this game. Electro-bolt is designed with a one-two punch in mind — giving you enhanced weapon damage if you strike while the opponent is still stunned by electrostatic charge. What cranks up the wow-factor of the action in BioShock is that the powers, weapons, environments

» BioShock is 100% shooter. It's just a shooter that offers more.

RPG elements and a mutant-filled spaceship run by a maniacal supercomputer called Shodan. The way it (she) knew your every move and actually taunted you combined with the ecology of the mutants made it one of the creepiest games to grace the PC.

This game is a little different. System Shock 2 took on extra RPG elements because its engine wasn't up to the shooter standards of the time, while BioShock is cutting edge and designed from the ground up to be a shooter experience.

The action is explosive. Even on the 360, it feels like a PC shooter, and it moves faster than both Halo and Gears of War. You'll be

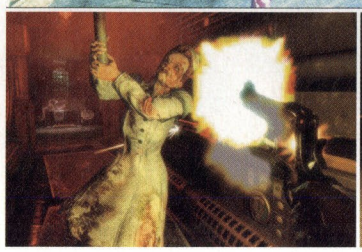
If our name was Big Daddy, we'd wear a mask too

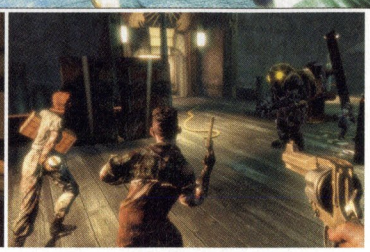
and AI are all designed to lock together into punching combos that go way beyond one-two.

Oil slicks can be set on fire and it spreads. Bad guys can be set on fire. Water puts out fire, and conducts electricity. Electricity shorts out locks and security systems. Objects in the world have physics properties so you can pick them up with telekinesis. Now put it all together. You can lead a bunch of foes towards an oil slick, light it as they pass through and watch the flames spread. Your next stop is the nearest water because that's where you've sent them with the flames. Maybe you have a hacked turret waiting, or a grenade, or an Electro-bolt (water conducts, remember).

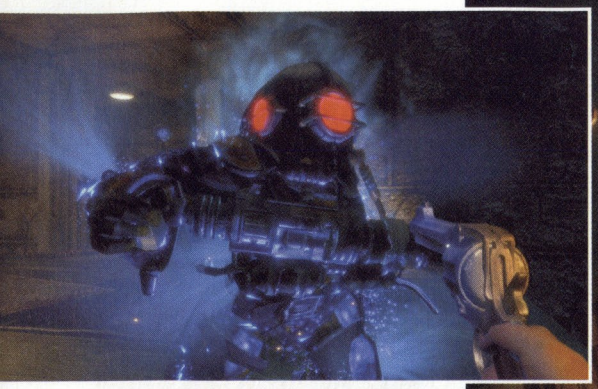
It means you can rock the action on three separate levels. You can play it like a guns-blazing shooter. You can add in the world and blast away until you see the gene-freaks hit water and then you can remember the Electro-bolt trick and quickly switch to it to zap them all at once. Finally, you can get all tactical and try to orchestrate the action, driving bad guys to water with fire, using blazing oil to corral them, using Enrage to turn the enemies on to each other, or putting proximity grenades on barrels so you have-ready made homing missiles you can direct with telekinesis.

Playing through the first levels, I have to admit I was very much the guns-blazing player. As I said, this thing is fast — and it is a lot of fun blasting creepy, decadent, self-mutated flappers with balls of flame, lightning and good old-fashioned bullets. Keep in mind that not only is Irrational made up of ex-Looking Glass people who actually worked on the System Shock titles, it is also the developer of Tribes 2 and SWAT4. These guys know shooters, and you can tell from the meaty feel to the attacks, from the simple revolver right up to





What We'd Like to See:
So far Bioshock promises to provided everything we could possibly want to see, we just can't wait for it to deliver.



If this is the red-light district, that's one ugly streetwalker

even non-explosive plasmid powers like the freezing cryo-shards.

Talking to Levine, he confirms that he sees BioShock as 100% shooter. It's just a shooter that offers more: "Why just have linear corridors? Why just have monsters popping out of boxes, why just have empty warehouses? You know? Why not have these story parts of the game?"

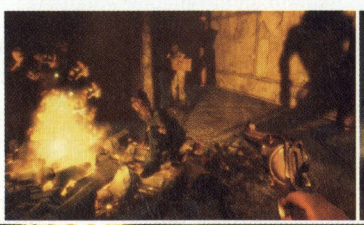
This approach has added multiple paths through levels, hidden areas, hints scattered through-out the levels in an almost adventure game way, and unique roving boss battles where Big Daddies and Little Sisters freely wander around levels and you get to choose the time and arena when you finally think it's time to crack them open for the tasty Adam-upgrades inside.

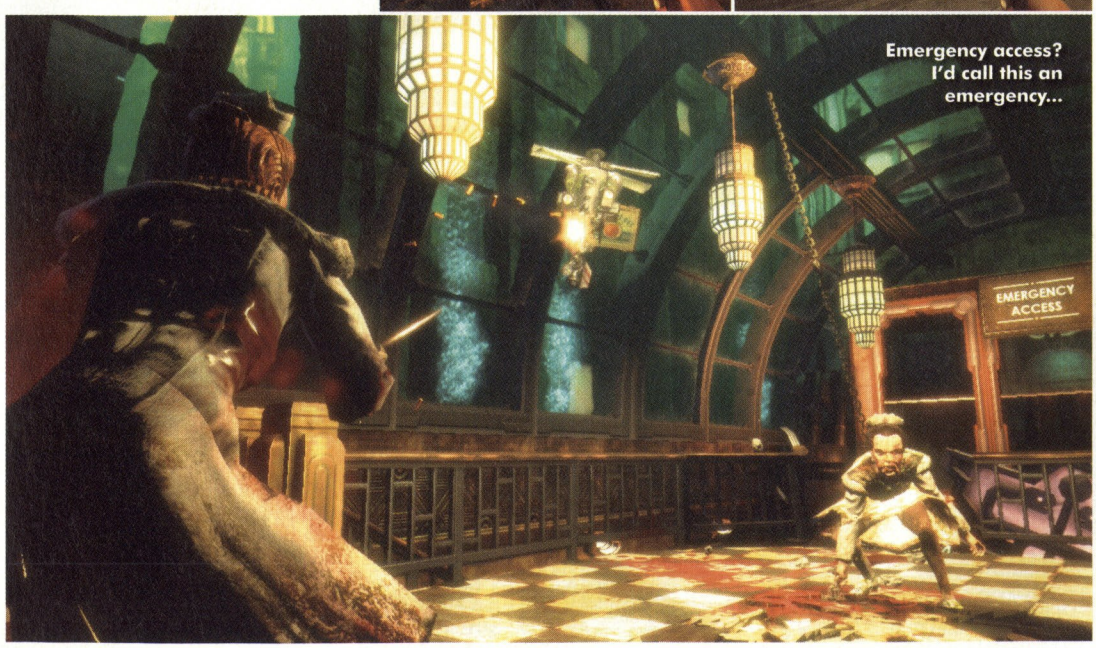
It's also attached story hooks to every free surface. A lot of players are going to come for the shooting, and stay for the world.

BioShock is set in the undersea utopia of Rapture — a haven created by the eccentric industrialist Andrew Ryan, as a place where great people could be great without the crappiness of the masses keeping them down. Strangely, nobody has heard anything from the city in a year, and exploring it you soon realise why: the gene altering substance Adam.

In a place full of overly-ambitious people, built on the dream of unrestrained capitalism, and indulging any fantasy they can afford, Adam was like a spark in a tinderbox. You've got all of these themes of excess, decadence, and consumerism run wild. At its heart you have a number of characters. You have Andrew Ryan still running the show and watching your every move with his clicking cameras (goodness only knows what he's become).

"You shoot him, I'll just stand here and bleed!"





As his foil, you have Atlas, a voice on the end of your radio, leading you through the city. Even his friendship isn't free. He claims that he's cut off from his family and you're the only (sane) person in the area who can save them.

Next, you have Dr Tanebaum urging you not to harvest the Little Sisters (who look like little girls in the first stages of a good possession and who now collect Adam from the dead). She wants you to save them instead. Not only will that slow your growth of personal power (something Atlas urges you not to do for your sake, and his family's), but trusting Tanebuaum is tough, especially once you read her diaries. Let's just say that not all of the monsters in Rapture were created by Adam.

Then you have the mystery of your character. The game starts with him looking at a photo of his family, innocent as pie, before his plane mysteriously crashes, leaving him in the ocean, miles from any land ... except the art deco lighthouse that is the entrance to Rapture. As the game creeps on the hints start coming that the plane crash was no accident and your character might not be who he seems.

BioShock is shaping up to be breathtaking. From the action, to the environment to the art design. You haven't seen water effects in a game until you've swum through the shifting red highlights of fire on the water, or you've watched the tail section of your plane slowly drift down and spear into the glass tube you're walking across. Atmosphere is here in spades. While System Shock was known for setting, BioShock aims to drown you in it. <<

C&C 3: Tiberium Wars 360

SYSTEM: **XBOX 360/PS3**
CATEGORY: **RTS**
PLAYERS: **1-MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **EA**
DUE: **2007**

There's been a bit of resurgence in RTS gaming over the last few years. Middle Earth, the Warhammer 40K franchise, Supreme Commander and what have you. But it's been a few years between drinks for the big daddy, Command and Conquer. It was the series that most of us first multi-played with. It was for many of us, the first RTS we really got in to. Those dodgy home movies with Kane ranting about Tiberium, the Mammoth tank and more besides are kind of icons of the genre.

So it's good to see the old horse riding out again with C&C 3: The Tiberium Wars, available on PC and 360. I recently had a chance to have a sit down with some of the producers, talking about platform ports and stealing from the past.

'We paid a lot of attention to what the feedback was from our earlier games,' says Michael Glosecki, the driving force of the new game. 'We wanted to take what made the classic gameplay of not only the earlier Command and Conquer series but also combine that with what we'd learned from our other games. Specifically, Battle for Middle Earth.'

Michael plays the game on huge projector while we speak, showing the ease with which he moves through the various menus. I'm a PC gamer at heart and I wonder if there's any problem playing on the console. I've always been dubious about complex interfaces on the Xbox. 'It's simply a matter of creating an easy drag and click interface,' he replies, showing how simple it is the transfer quickly through a variety of build menus, before grouping together units into brigades. 'The classic C&C side bar interface is there, which allows you to move very quickly through the various kinds of commands and options.' At first, I'm dubious but Michael moves with speed and ease, navigating from battle tactics to complex build orders with only a press of the stick and a nudge of the D-pad, easing my concerns. Build items drop down from the build list, unit or building information pops in the bottom right corner of the screen when an item is selected and it all seems easy as.

» It's simply a matter of creating an easy drag and click interface

'We've spent a lot of time trying to build in elements of competitive play amongst the Xbox community. We've got a lot of clans already forming leagues, setting themselves up for competitions. We want C&C3 to be as much as spectator sport as it is a game. One of the features we really like is the ability to record a whole game, then write over the game like you'll see done in sportscasts.'

Of course, what good is league gaming on the internet without the capacity to humiliate their foes. Oh, but have no fear. We are way beyond Korean kids typing KEK as C&C has inbuilt support for VoIP and Xbox Live Vision. 'The game will allow you to see your opponents and talk directly to them. Also, if you're the winner of the game, the display will make your video larger than the others onscreen'.

It seems the guys know the power of smack talking live. <<

Need more pylons

/pewpew

What We'd Like to See:
Actual innovation in PC/Console ports rather than simply changing the graphics and trying to adapt the control scheme.

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

SYSTEM: **PS3, X360, PC**
CATEGORY: **FPS**
PLAYERS: **1-MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **INFINITY WARD**
DUE: **TBA**

The president of Infinity Ward, Grant Collier, joined us in Sydney this month to unveil the latest in the developer's principal franchise, and although there had been rumblings that the fourth Call of Duty would no longer pit you against WWII-era Nazis, it was still a pleasant surprise to see what he had in store for us with Call of Duty 4...

RETURN OF THE COMMUNIST BOGEYMAN

"During the development of Call of Duty 1 and 2, we had a lot of ideas that we couldn't fit into a World War II setting." Announced Grant Collier. "And that's why we decided to take the series into the present day."

Without the ever-reliable Nazis to menace the USA, it seems that the job has fallen to another of America's traditional bugbears – Russia.

The villain of the piece is a rogue militant leader named Zachiev, who is leading Russia into a war with the West, and not only that, but he has recruited the services of a more topical villain – terrorists. This not only allows COD4 to take the player to Russia, but also to the Middle East, something that Collier showed us in a variety of missions.

» The villain of the piece is a rogue militant leader named Zachiev

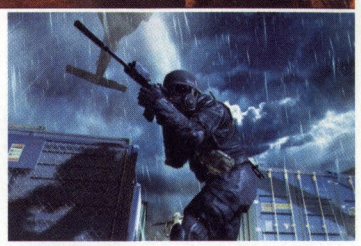
In the first of these Collier controlled a member of the British SAS, as he infiltrated a Russian warship under the cover of night. From the second the level opened you could see the quality of the game's visuals, the lighting in particular was superb, with the embers from a fellow soldier's cigarette lighting up his face with every puff. The stormy, rain-swept upper decks of the ship gave way to the gloomy, claustrophobic interiors, where Collier gleefully emptied his rifle into rows of Russian soldiers sleeping peacefully in their bunks.

The next in line was an American mission set in the Middle East. Here Collier showed us that stealth is coming back in a big way in COD4. By hiding amongst long grass or bushes, Collier was able to avoid being detected by the hapless terrorists, until he decided to pop out and riddle them full of an entire clip's worth of justice.

Not only will the game provide a wide variety of locations, but the story also stretches over a period of thirty years, with plenty of flashbacks to key historical moments that relate to the present-day conflict.

"One mission you'll be a British SAS attacking a ship, and the next you'll be fifteen years in the past, trying to assassinate Zachiev." Says Collier. "This way we've really been able to keep a lot of variation in the missions."

Old school Hyper: Here comes a chopper...



This is war we're talking about, so you know there's going to be plenty of gadgets and firepower involved, and Call of Duty certainly looks to deliver on that front. Among your expansive arsenal will be the usual roster of realistically modelled pistols, shotguns, assault rifles, sniper rifles, grenades and more. Interestingly enough, you'll even have access to realistic tear gas grenades, and Collier hints that there may even be some biological weapons on hand.

The last details that Grant Collier would reveal were about the game's multiplayer, which will now feature persistent stats and an experience system, so not only will every triumphant win and humiliating loss be tabulated, but they'll also improve your abilities in the field.

Also included will be a classic mode and a realism mode. Classic mode is your standard multiplayer experience, where your character is pretty hardwearing, but in realism mode, you'll be dead in one shot.

Best of all, Collier is also promising that the game will maintain a constant 60 frames per second on every system. War has never look so good. <<

What We'd Like to See:
Call of Duty 4 definitely looks amazing, but so far we haven't seen anything that has convinced us that its going to be more than just 'more of the same' with a new, modernised, coat of paint. We'd like to see Infinity Ward really challenge the series' formula – since as eager as we are already, that would give us something to really get excited about.

HALO 3 BETA IMPRESSIONS

When I picked up a copy of Crackdown, it was because it was an awesome game, and not simply because it contained the promise of access to one of the biggest games of the year months before release. Nevertheless, there was a certain part of me that always knew that come May 16, I'd be accepting Crackdown's gracious invitation to join in on Halo 3's beta test, but as it turns out, I didn't even have to wait that long. Microsoft themselves let us get hands on with the game several days before the official commencement of the beta, but the real question at hand is of course – was it any good?

MACHINEGUN BATTLEAXE

Well, yes. It was. The three maps we got to try out were Highground, a mountainous map with a lot of vertical action thanks to a nearby fort, Snowbound, which as its name suggests is set on an ice plane, and Valhalla, where we found our favourite new Halo 3 feature... but more on that later.

To look at Halo 3, it is obvious that Bungie have really tried to keep the game recognisably within the Halo universe. The building exteriors and interiors in particular are still mostly bare just like Halo 1 and 2, with the only superfluous details being the weapons scattered around the place. The natural environments are slightly less utilitarian, with a lot of trees, grass and even some pretty flowers for you to admire, along with the usual crop of rocks and barricades to shelter behind.

While it retains the style of previous Halo games, it does look considerably more impressive than its predecessors. The game's advanced graphical techniques come into play in the gorgeous-looking dynamic water effects, high dynamic range lighting, ridiculously detailed textures and some physics and particle effects that are impossible to ignore.

When it comes to the gameplay side of things though, Halo's multiplayer has never been broke, and Bungie certainly haven't gone out of their way to fix these phantom problems that never existed. As a result, getting our hands on Halo 3 was a somewhat familiar experience. What I'm trying to say here is that it basically plays identically to Halo 2, although there are of course a few obligatory new additions.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE GAMEPLAY SIDE OF THINGS THOUGH, HALO'S MULTIPLAYER HAS NEVER BEEN BROKE, AND BUNGIE CERTAINLY HAVEN'T GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO FIX IT

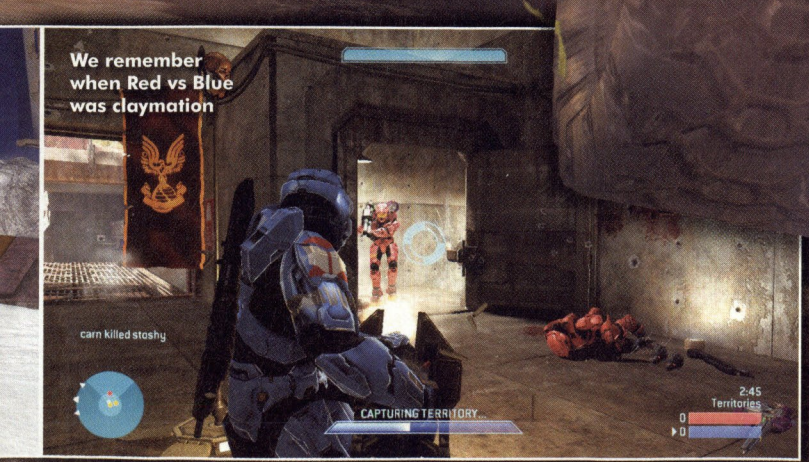
The first of these is the new weapons, and the return of an old favourite – the assault rifle from the original Halo. The fully automatic rifle was noticeably absent from Halo 2, and I for one happily welcome it back, since Halo 2's battle rifle was rubbish.

The real new additions come in the form of the Brute Spike Grenade (a sort of high-tech nail bomb), a massive Machinegun Turret and Missile Pod, both of which the Chief has to pull out of their moorings in the ground, and the Brute Spiker, a machinegun that also has two battleaxe blades attached to the front of it.

Despite the coolness of the machinegun-battleaxe, the new weapon that promises the most excitement is the Spartan Laser. The laser is obviously directly inspired by Quake's rail gun, being both laboriously slow to reload and fire, and requiring you to acquire and hold a target for some time before it discharges, but if you're unfortunate enough to get tagged by one – the only thing left of you will be a red stain on the battlefield.

IT'S NOT A PARTY WITHOUT A MAN-CANNON

Without doubt the single greatest thing that we discovered in our time playing the Halo 3 beta was the "man-cannon" that can be found in the Valhalla map. Not only do Bungie deserve some kudos for giving a simple jump-pad a name that is so primed for double entendres and other tasteless innuendo (which I will attempt to avoid here), but they also provided some of the most fun of our entire experience with the Halo 3 beta.



Taking your Spartan and running him across a man-cannon will launch him into the air and send him across the map in an arcing trajectory until you land right in the middle of the action, but just shooting your Spartan off a man-cannon is not where the fun lies – for that you need a vehicle.

Our objective quickly became to simply discover who could do the most outrageous stunts by launching ourselves from a man-cannon riding one of Halo 3's new vehicles – the Mongoose ATV. We managed to master flips, spins as well as the pinnacle of man-cannon tricks: recruiting a passenger to ride with you, driving off a man-cannon and then jumping out of the vehicle in mid-air and sending your passenger to a certain doom. By the time we realised that you could also take a hulking Warthog off the man-cannons, hilarity had truly erupted.

We do have some gripes about the man-cannons though, the first of which was that they don't send you high enough, or far enough for us to really trick out our jumps. We'd often find ourselves midway through a double back flip, or a 1280-degree spin, only to have our stunt cut short by a premature meeting with the dirt.

Additionally, we were hoping that throwing a grenade into a man-cannon would produce a kind of makeshift mortar-launcher, but alas, whilst the grenade did launch, it exploded in the air instead of on the ground where it could have done some serious damage – that needs some work Bungie.

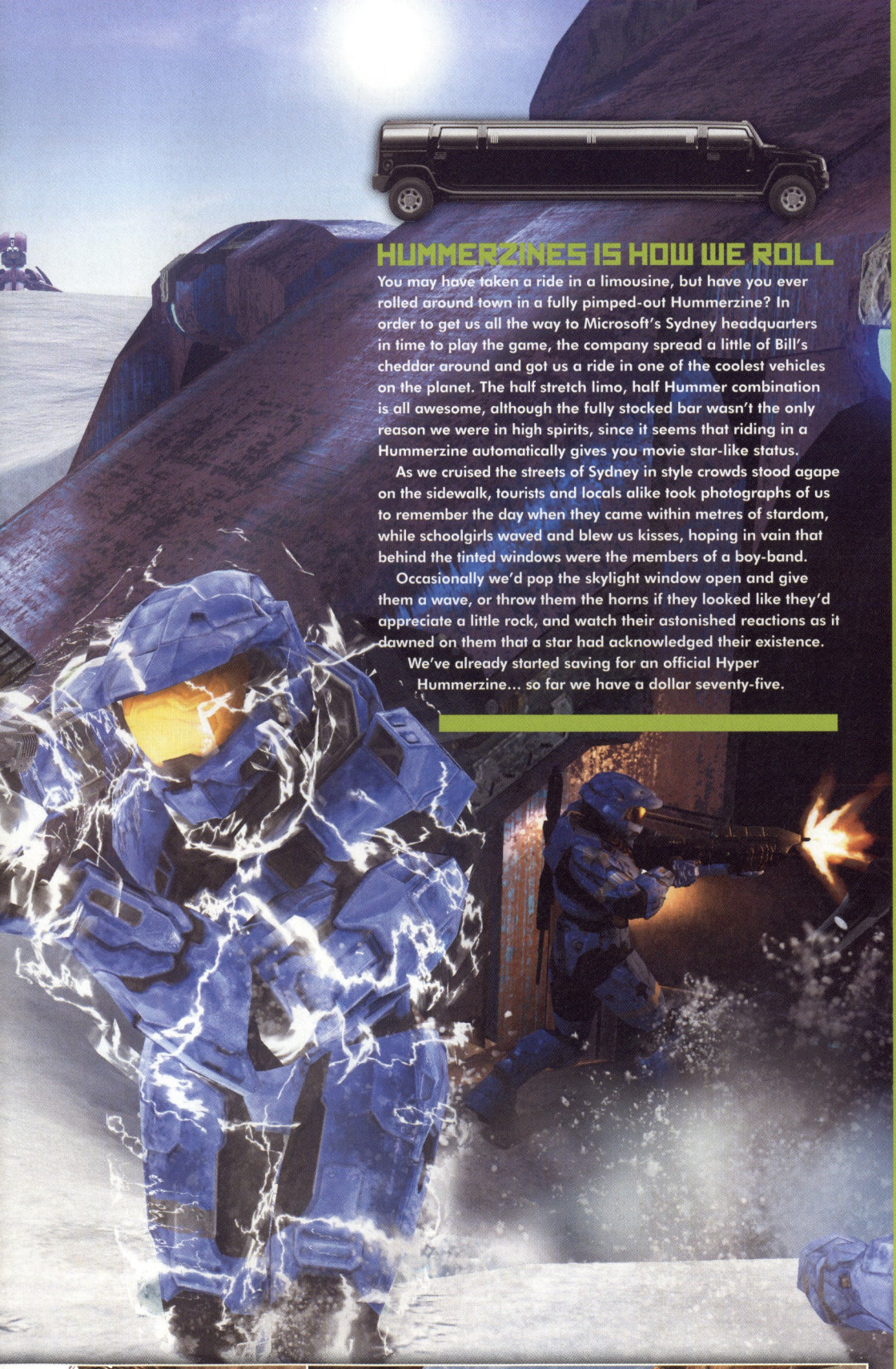
JUST LIKE YOUR OLD STUFF

From my glowing report you could surmise that the Halo 3 beta is good – and you'd be right – but only insomuch as Halo 2's multiplayer was good.

Improving the visuals and adding a few new features gleaned from other games (jump pads from Unreal, rail gun from Quake) could be seen as necessary maintenance for a new instalment in an established series, but in its beta form Halo 3 still doesn't feel dissimilar enough to playing Halo 2, albeit, a far prettier version.

The beta is of course a work in progress, and the code we play today is no indication of the game's quality tomorrow, so all I can really say is that while the Halo 3 beta is easy on the eyes and has some great new weapons, it doesn't have me convinced that Halo 3 will be much more than an incremental update of the games we've already played.

Then again, there's still some time to go before the final release, and it does have the man-cannon...



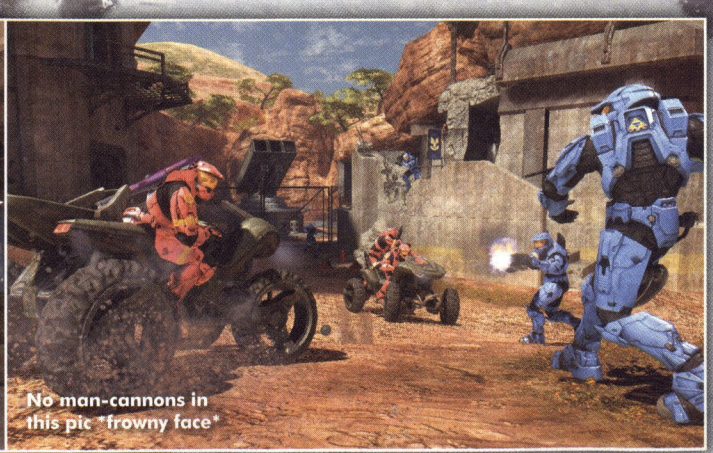
HUMMERZINES IS HOW WE ROLL

You may have taken a ride in a limousine, but have you ever rolled around town in a fully pimped-out Hummerzine? In order to get us all the way to Microsoft's Sydney headquarters in time to play the game, the company spread a little of Bill's cheddar around and got us a ride in one of the coolest vehicles on the planet. The half stretch limo, half Hummer combination is all awesome, although the fully stocked bar wasn't the only reason we were in high spirits, since it seems that riding in a Hummerzine automatically gives you movie star-like status.

As we cruised the streets of Sydney in style crowds stood agape on the sidewalk, tourists and locals alike took photographs of us to remember the day when they came within metres of stardom, while schoolgirls waved and blew us kisses, hoping in vain that behind the tinted windows were the members of a boy-band.

Occasionally we'd pop the skylight window open and give them a wave, or throw them the horns if they looked like they'd appreciate a little rock, and watch their astonished reactions as it dawned on them that a star had acknowledged their existence.

We've already started saving for an official Hyper Hummerzine... so far we have a dollar seventy-five.



No man-cannons in this pic *frowny face*

SECOND OPINION

Last month in my Bad Cop column I wrote a little rant about expectations and how they have a nasty habit of doing us in – either because we expect so much we convince ourselves that something lives up to our expectation so that our hopes aren't crushed, or that our expectations are so high that the crushenating is inevitable.

Welcome to my opinion of the Halo 3 Beta.

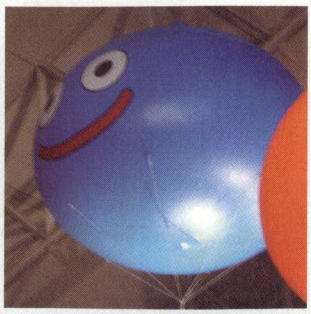
Before anyone gets up in arms (readers and distributors alike) I am well aware that the three levels we have been playing are not fully indicative of the finished product so to form a final opinion at this time would well and truly be a mistake but my current feeling is that Halo 3 is just a case of same old, same old with a little coat of paint, some new guns and a few little tweaks. It just doesn't seem like nearly enough. But that's the nature of the Beta beast after all. It's not indicative of the final game – it's simultaneously a bug testing feature and a teaser of what is to come.

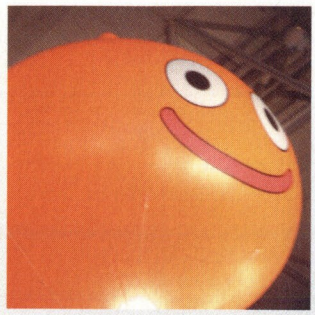
Of what we saw the only thing that really took my fancy was is introduction of the awesomely named "Man Cannon" jump pads. How can you not love something called a "Man Cannon"? Unfortunately the name of the jump pad is currently the best thing about it – with the current implementation the "Man Cannon" (I really can't say that enough) is slow and not particularly useful – sure it sends you flying half way across the map but with no mid air control available to the player it just makes you an easy target. The most fun we had with the "Man Cannons" was simply experimenting with what we could fire from them; Warthogs, grenades, the new Mongoose quad bike thing, corpses. All of them could be thrown to varying degrees of hilarity.

It's kind of telling that the most fun we had with the beta was playing silly buggers with a lacklustre jump pad. A few weeks before the Beta was released the Hyper crew attended a press event that featured multiplayer Halo (1, original, classic, whatever you want to call it). Playing the Beta felt the same. Sure the game is looking good, balanced and fun at the moment but it just feels like more of the same. Switching button layout and adding a few new weapons just doesn't seem to be enough for a flagship title. But that could just be me. Maybe I've fallen into the trap I've been so willing to bitch about; people letting their expectations get the better of them. Or maybe this time those expectations are justified. Halo is the flagship Xbox title and as such I don't think it's unfair to expect more than an incremental upgrade. Fingers crossed that as time goes on we will see more and more new content, with the emphasis on new.

Once again though, this is not final code. In a few weeks we could hear that the Man Cannons have been significantly tweaked, the vehicles changed and the weapons rebalanced. By release Halo 3 multiplayer could be a whole other thing. Colour me cautious currently but we'll just have to wait and see what the next few weeks and months will bring.

Daniel Wilks





We want a Slime balloon

Party Like It's 1987

Hyper heads for the SquareEnix homeland with a ticket to party – this is the comedown.

We spent last weekend up in Tokyo at the invitation of SquareEnix, the Mega Corporation behind such videogame behemoths as Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. This year is the 20th anniversary of Final Fantasy and – more importantly for younger fans and the original PlayStation Generation – it's also the 10th birthday of Final Fantasy VII, which remains the most successful and popular game in the whole series. To celebrate, SquareEnix has a number of Final Fantasy- and FFVII-related spin-offs and remakes set for release in Japan this year. And to publicise those, there was a bash at the Makuhari Messe (venue of the annual Tokyo Game Show, even though it's outside of Tokyo and actually lies in Chiba prefecture), which was open to press and public alike, with the grand title of 'SquareEnix Party 2007'. (Which, we suppose, paves the way for a SquareEnix Party 2008. Who needs TGS?)

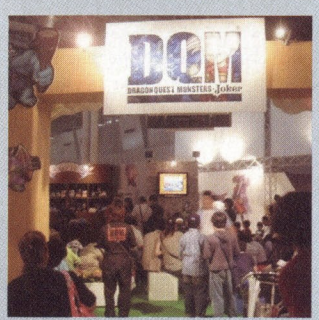
Skirting past the queues of (literally) thousands of SquareEnix fans with our accredited press status (hurray), we decided to firstly check out all the non-game stuff on show. Perverse? Yeah, maybe. But SquareEnix and Final Fantasy is about much more than games here in Japan.

One of the highlights of the show was a cosplay tournament held at the Final Fantasy XI stage, where visibly nervous cosplayers paraded their outfits in front of a crowd of a few hundred members of the public. Cosplay is a serious game here, of course, and we spotted a girl with tears in her eyes as she walked away from the stage – she had been voted third-best, poor thing. It probably didn't help that the guy SquEnix had hired to host the event and introduce the (largely female) cast of entrants was a Terry-Thomas in Carry On... kind of bloke: "Why, hel-lo. Aren't you the loveliest creature?"

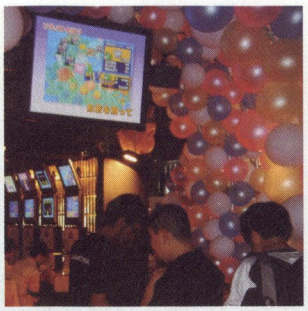
Elsewhere, there was a Music CD shop carrying virtually every SquareEnix soundtrack release on lovely (outmoded) plastic discs. We somehow resisted the temptation to Brave Fencer soundtrack our trip home, and instead began a scavenger hunt for freebies and curios. We managed to get a Final Fantasy Tactics poster, which ties in nicely with the recent launch of the PSP version of the PSone original. Nice. And then we saw a library. No, not a library in the "Shh, get your own newspaper!" mould, but more of a Library From Heaven – a small island in the middle of this chaos where

Words and images: JONTI DAVIES

DQ + Mario = License to print money



Final Fantasy VII - the least final of all fantasies



Balloon fetishists

Sometimes fanboyism is desperately cute

Pod people

we could select a Manga volume (from among the dozens of Manga that are based on SquareEnix IP), take a seat, and have a read/look: sweet respite in the pages of Full Metal Alchemist.

We swam away from that quiet island and found, much to our surprise, another one. Bang in the middle of the show floor, SquareEnix had positioned its non-RPG wares – specifically, its forthcoming DS edutainment software – on an orange circle of carpet, making those wares playable at low tables and low chairs. There were no significant queues of people waiting to try out the DS Style range of titles, and conversely there were never any empty seats. Playable here were SquareEnix' DS-based guides to Classical Music Knowledge and Gardening, both of which attracted a high percentage of senior users. Meanwhile, all the backpackers and 'fleeters' (the Japanese term for independent young people who choose not to pursue a traditional career course) got their kicks from examining the Tourist Guide software that provides a Virtual Sherpa in climes such as Thailand, Italy, and France.

PHYSICAL PLAYTIME

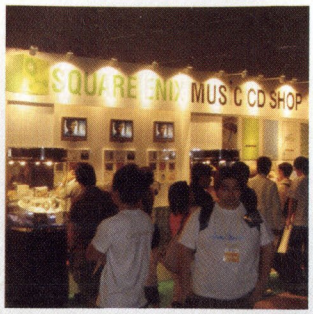
In terms of the games on show, SquareEnix had all of its big guns firing. Dragon Quest Swords and Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles on the Wii both drew great crowds, who appeared to be eager to enjoy the action-oriented Wii breaks from their beloved series. Crystal Chronicles: Crystal Bearers will depend on its multiplayer mode to a far lesser extent than the fun-but-flawed GameCube original, however. And it's probably for the best: without leaning on the crutch of GBA link-up, we can see Crystal Chronicles on the Wii for what it really is – a cute and colourful alternative to the ultramodern direction being taken in Final Fantasy XIII.

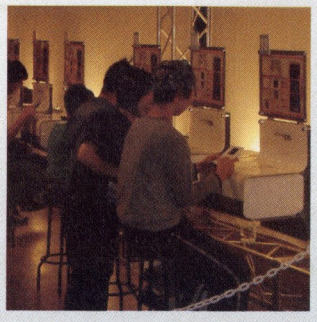
> "SquareEnix had all of its big guns firing. Dragon Quest Swords and Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles on the Wii both drew great crowds"

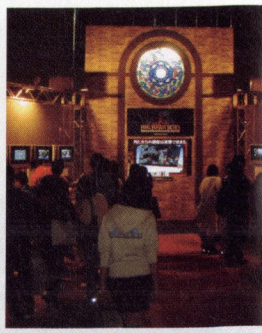
The forthcoming DS sequel to Crystal Chronicles seems to offer a similar experience (although one that's attuned to the DS hardware), with multiplayer again a key feature. Unfortunately, though, we found out that Ring of Fates, as the DS version is called, will only offer local multiplayer – sadly, there's no way to use a friend code and play along with your pal who lives in Timbuktu...

Surprisingly, and particularly in reference to Dragon Quest Swords, most of the general players we spoke to at the show were not excited by the prospect of waving their arms while playing Wii versions of their favourite SquareEnix properties. "For games like Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy," said one attendee, "I really think a traditional pad such as the Dual Shock is more suitable." Fair comment, perhaps, but on the other hand the DS' stylus control interface hasn't prevented anyone here from enjoying Final Fantasy III or Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings – at the time of writing, Revenant Wings is top of Japan's all-formats sales chart.

There definitely seems to be some discord within SquareEnix on this subject, though. We spoke with the Director of Crystal Bearers and he was verbose in his praise of the Wii hardware, while also pointing out that, "Developers should make the games they want to make, and then decide whether or not to put them on the Wii." We also bumped into







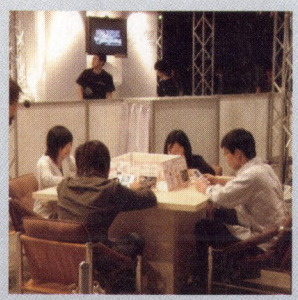
Dragon Quest creator Yuji Horii, however, and he explained his (admittedly unrealistic) desire for game hardware "never to change." But these are times of change, and SquareEnix is in fact at the forefront of one of the game industry's most significant movements: the migration to HD.

HD PLAYTIME

There was a 'closed mega theatre' at the show, which featured a partly new Final Fantasy XIII trailer on loop – and it looked almost implausibly good. There are now in-game battle scenes spliced into the promo footage for FFXIII, but such is the technical standard of SquareEnix' patented White Engine that there is no discernible drop in quality when the trailer flits from cutscene to real-time. On this showing, FFXIII will be one of the games that, finally, has the power to sell PS3s to as-yet-unimpressed Japanese punters. A HD remake of Final Fantasy VII would probably do the trick just as well, mind, but with no hint of that dream-game at this show, we'll just have to carry con daydreaming about it for now.

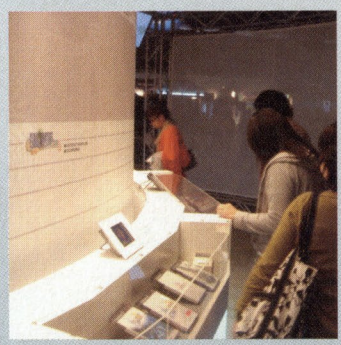
Back in the realm of reality, however, there is another HD hope: The Last Remnant. Although it wasn't a part of the SquareEnix Party, we were treated to a private viewing at the company's Shibuya HQ a few days before the Party kicked off. The Last Remnant seems to represent a lot of SquareEnix' ambitions: it's positioned halfway between Western fantasy sensibility (it looks a lot like Lord of the Rings and has a very Tolkien-esque ambience) and the free-roaming style of Final Fantasy XII. And to add meaning to this compromise,

> "There was a 'closed mega theatre' at the show, which featured a partly new Final Fantasy XIII trailer on loop"

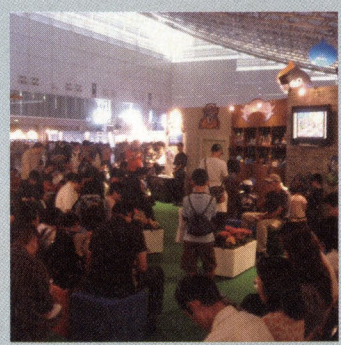


Quick! To the book depository!

Three awe-stuck Sqeenix fans socialise...



Games so good, Sqeenix have to lock them up



"Okay, assume the possition. Everyone look into your laps"

Proof that in Japan, Sqeenix is like religion

The Last Remnant is being developed for both the PS3 and Xbox 360, and it's also scheduled for a simultaneous release in both Japan and the US.

It seems like a huge risk, though – in trying to please everyone, is SquareEnix possibly going to end up satisfying no one? We were thinking along those lines – until we saw a demo of The Last Remnant's battle system, which has more promise than any other system RPG battle set-up we've seen in years. Not only is it huge in scale, with the battle we saw taking place on a wide open field, but it features rhythm-action elements (tap buttons that appear in time to ensure that your fighters land their blows), a morale gauge that dictates the overall result by showing which camp has the higher spirits, and a system for calling reinforcements that adds to the tension and allows battles to escalate into full-scale wars. Impressive stuff.

GOING BACK IN TIME

Two new additions to the Final Fantasy Tactics series were at the show. The PSP remake of Final Fantasy Tactics, named The War of the Lions, had been launched at retail in Japan two days before this exhibition began, but it still had queues that resulted in three-hour waiting times for those who were craving a tactical fix. Easily the most enjoyable feature of this redone version is its wi-fi two-player battle mode, which rivals Advance Wars for its ability to devour time when you're not looking.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance 2, meanwhile, is in development for the DS. It's interesting that SquEnix has retained the Advance part of this title – surely that's like adding 2 to the end of a GameCube sequel to an N64 game? Mario Kart 64 2 on the 'Cube, anyone? Regardless, FFT A2 is cute – more so than the straight PSone-to-PSP style of The War of the Lions – and it has interesting features, such as a new law system, which increase our desire to return to Ivalice. With Tactics Advance 2 not due in Japan until the autumn, though, it could be quite a while before we see an English-language version.

Something we'll undoubtedly have to wait even longer to see again, though, is the duo of PSP Star Ocean remakes that were demoed to us at SquareEnix' HQ. It should be well worth the wait: Star Ocean 1: First Departure in its PSP remake form will mark the first time this legendary Super Famicom RPG has appeared in English, and a new version of Star Ocean 2 is also on its way. As well as these nostalgic reasons to get a PSP, SquareEnix teased us with information that Star Ocean 4, a bona fide new entry in the series, is in development. For an unspecified format. We ended our time at the show just gazing at the wonders held inside a small Star Ocean Museum booth. The Square part of Enix is important but, for us, it's the Enix bit that has more resonance. <<

We've got two words to say about these trinkets: eBay gold.

SNATCHER

Hideo Kojima's Forgotten Masterpiece

Few have played it, and yet Hideo Kojima's cyberpunk adventure, Snatcher, is now recognised as one of his best games. We tracked down Jeff Lupetin and Lucy Childs, the voices of Snatcher, to find out more about Kojima's forgotten masterpiece.

Maurice Branscombe dedicates this story to all those cyberpunks who fight against injustice and corruption every day of their lives.

In many ways Snatcher is visionary director Hideo Kojima's answer to Blade Runner. Not only does the game share a similar setting and premise with Ridley Scott's science-fiction masterwork, but the two projects also experienced (at least from a Western perspective) a strikingly similar lifecycle.

While in its native Japan, Snatcher was somewhat of a phenomenon. When it first released into the rest of the world in 1994 it was almost completely ignored, managing to attract only a small discerning audience before unceremoniously fading into obscurity.

Then something happened. After the international success of Kojima's Metal Gear Solid series, a renewed interest in his lesser-known works began to develop. Of these, Snatcher is most often singled out as the most brilliant; something that may never have been realised in the West had it not been for Kojima's newfound status as an auteur game director.

Now, more than thirteen years since it made its first and only appearance outside Japan, Snatcher is revered as one of the world's great videogame masterpieces, along with the rest of director Hideo Kojima's oeuvre.

Not only that but Snatcher is also once again back in the headlines, with a new collaboration between Hideo Kojima and Goichi "Suda51" Suda (director of Killer 7 and the forthcoming No More Heroes) that will apparently see the Snatcher license revived in a variety of forms.

With Snatcher fever riding high and a new Snatcher invasion waiting on the distant horizon there's never been a better time to revisit this forgotten classic, and to help us do it, we tracked down the stars of the game themselves, the two actors that brought Snatcher's two leading characters to life – Jeff Lupetin and Lucy Childs.

AMNESIAC GUMSHOE

The Snatcher story begins in 1988. Immediately after completing the second game in his Metal Gear series in 1987, director Hideo Kojima turned his talents to a new genre of game – the graphic adventure.

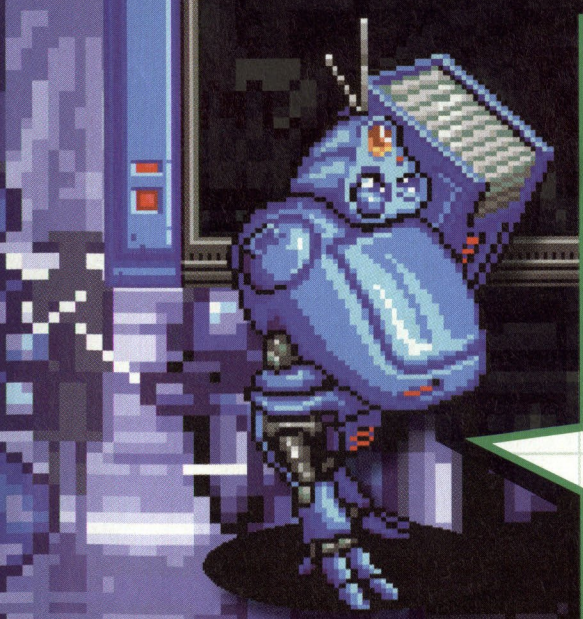
Heavily inspired by tech-noir films like Blade Runner and The Terminator with a little bit of Invasion of the Body Snatchers thrown in for good measure, Snatcher takes place in Neo Kobe City, Japan, in the year 2046. The city of Neo Kobe is being plagued by mysterious artificial life forms called "Snatchers", a cybernetic race killing the city's inhabitants, stealing their identities and then passing themselves off as humans.

Although the Snatchers have a robotic metal endoskeleton which is strikingly similar to the T-800 chassis seen in The Terminator, once they're skinned up each Snatcher is indistinguishable from a normal human being, making everyone a suspect and even the most familiar character a deadly threat.

Playing as Gillian Seed, an amnesiac gumshoe working for an anti-Snatcher organisation called J.U.N.K.E.R. (Japanese Undercover Neuro Kinetic Elimination Rangers), you have to discover the cause of the Snatcher outbreak, what their motivations are and what they have to do with his own shadowy past.

Upon its initial Japanese release on the NEC PC-88 and MSX2 home computers in 1988, Snatcher caused a sensation. The game quickly became one of the most popular adventure games for either system, something that would spur on several remakes in the coming years, beginning with a CD-ROM edition for the PC-Engine in 1992 and ending with Snatcher making it onto the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation in 1996.

There was of course one other version though. Specifically created for the American, European and other English speaking territories (that means you) was Snatcher for



SHOWER SCENES

After thirteen years anyone's memory will start to fog over a little, and despite Jeff Lupetin and Lucy Childs' recollection being a little hazy on a couple of topics, there was one part of Snatcher that they remember vividly.

"I seem to remember that if you went the right way in the game it could get a little pornographic." Remembers Lucy.

"They showed us a part of the game, a shower scene I think, and I just thought that was hilarious!" laughs Lucy. "We were all sort of 'whoa!' We'd never seen anything like this in a game, but I remember thinking that this was really cool."

Jeff too remembers Snatcher being a little risque.

"I don't know which version you've seen but the Japanese version was very racy." Agrees Jeff. "You know, like the scene where the girl's in the shower and stuff like that. The American version was a lot tamer."

The scene in question was of course a notorious scene where Jeff's character, Gillian, walks in on another character in the shower - the eighteen-year-old daughter of another J.U.N.K.E.R. operative, who just so happens to be a super-hot model (Hideo, you rascal).

While this scene still plays out in the English-language version of the game, a few frames of animation were cut to make it a little less gratuitous, but in some scenes (for example, when Gillian calls a phone-sex line) the mature nature of the game still remained.

the Sega Mega CD.

Apart from the sightly tweaked visuals and sound, Snatcher Mega CD was a direct port of the PC Engine version, but with one critical difference – it had at last been translated into English, and the spoken dialogue re-recorded with an American cast of actors...

ASSEMBLING THE CAST

When it came to casting the two most important character voices, that of Gillian Seed and his sidekick Metal Gear, there were two actors that stood out, Jeff Lupetin and Lucy Childs.

"Prior to Snatcher," recalls Lupetin, "I worked at two TV stations in Chicago. I did the voices for their children's programming."

"Before that I was doing improv comedy revues in Chicago and New York. So my background was in improvisation, and then I got into doing voices. I'd always liked doing voices since I was a kid. I watched a lot of cartoons and I used to imitate different characters... so that's kind of where I started, and after a while I got into doing commercial voice over. Eventually I got cast in Snatcher, and that was the first game I did."

While Jeff may not have had much personal experience in amnesia or cyborg-hunting, his naturally hard-boiled voice made him the perfect choice to play the tough, yet sensitive, character of Gillian Seed. It was a role that Jeff could see more than a little of his own personality in.

"Gillian was just a hard-boiled tough guy. Listen, like this [puts on his best Gillian Seed voice], but as the game progresses you get to see a bit more of his heart."

"I'm kinda hard boiled at times." Laughs Jeff. "That's kinda part of my personality. So Gillian was the perfect character for me, I understood where this guy was coming from."

Meanwhile, the role of Metal Gear Mk.II, Gillian's sidekick, also had to be decided. The knee-high navigator droid was written into Snatcher's script as homage to his Metal Gear series of games, both in name and in appearance.

This was a critical part to cast, as not only did Metal Gear's voice have to sound robotic, but it also had to be likable and humorous, since for much of the game the little robot would be Gillian's (and the players') only companion.

"I had been working as an actress since I was about 18 or 19 years old." Recalls Lucy Childs, the voice of Metal Gear. "I really worked for about 23 years as a professional actress. It was my first life."

"About ten years before Snatcher I started doing a lot of television commercials and some film work, all while still performing in theatre, which was really were I lived."

"Towards the late eighties I really got lucky and was able to get a lot of voice over work." Says Lucy. "One day my agent called me a told me about this videogame project, and it sounded very interesting to me."

When it came to auditioning for Snatcher, Lucy recalls reading for the game's other female roles but says that when the producers heard her distinctive voice they cast her immediately as the diminutive droid.

"When I read for Metal Gear that's what they cast me as, and I didn't mind." Laughs Lucy. "I though it was a really fun role."

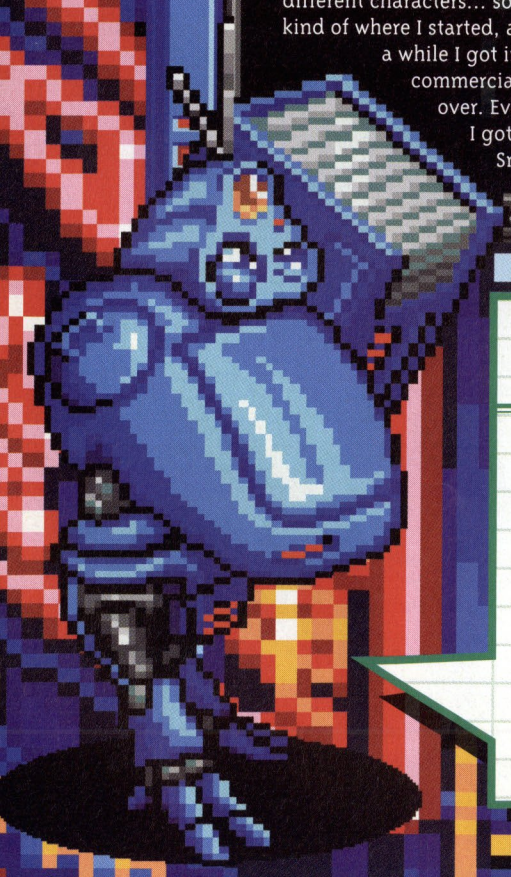
"One of the things that I liked about Metal Gear was that it had an unusual voice. It was more interesting for me to do, instead of just doing the low and sexy voice that the other female roles called for."

"It was a really hard voice to do though." Lucy adds with a laugh. "I remember that I had to drink a lot of water!"

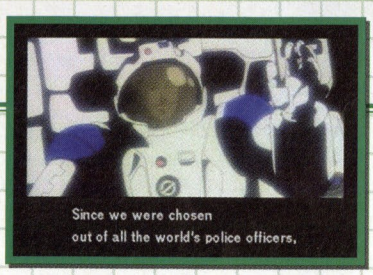
RECORDING SNATCHER

The recording sessions for the English language Snatcher took place one week in early 1994, at Chicago's LRS Recording Company. The rest of the cast had been decided, made up of local Chicago actors including Ray Van Steen, Jim Parks, Susan Mele, Kimberly Harne and Lynn Foosaner.

"The recording session was with the entire cast, and it was a blast." Remembers Lucy Childs. "Chicago was



POLICENAUTS TRANSLATION



Since we were chosen out of all the world's police officers,

Another exciting project on the horizon for Hideo Kojima fans is a fan translation of the game he made after Snatcher - Policenauts. With a similar style of cinematic gameplay, Policenauts is often considered a spiritual sequel to Snatcher, but since Snatcher sold so poorly in the West, the game was never translated, and thus, never released outside of Japan.

Thanks to some very dedicated Policenauts fans however we may finally be able to play the game with complete English subtitles. The Policenauts fan translation project aims to make the entire game playable in English, with the original Japanese soundtrack, and to release a patch that can easily be applied to the game.

"The actual translation of the game text is already finished." Says Marc Laidlaw, the brains behind the Policenauts translation project. "We expect to release the patch sometime later this year, after we've ironed out the issues with the text display in the game."

You will need an original copy of the Japanese PSone Policenauts game to get the patch working, but if do you go to the effort to track it down, you won't regret it - especially once you can understand what's going on!

When it's released the patch will be available from www.policenauts.net.

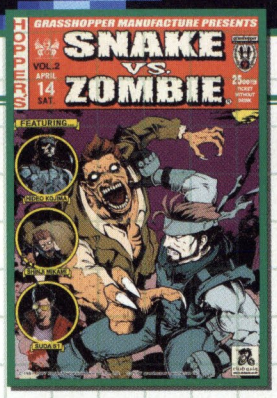
SUDATCHER

So far only a few details have come out about Goichi Suda and Hideo Kojima's collaboration on their Snatcher-themed radio play. The first is of course that Suda himself is writing the script, and that the name has been decided as 'Snatchers'.

The events of the radio drama will apparently take place before those of the first Snatcher game, and will feature another J.U.N.K.E.R. operative in the lead role, Jean-Jack Gibson.

Observant Snatcher fans will notice that Gibson is that same guy who dies about fifteen minutes into Snatcher's storyline by having his head wrenched clean off his shoulders in one of the game's goriest moments. This is most certainly a prequel then.

One other surprising announcement is that both Kojima and Suda will join a cast of professional Japanese voice actors to perform as characters in the play.



There has been some speculation that the radio play could end up being translated into English if the demand was high enough, but at the moment it's probably best to assume that the show will never leave Japan, that way when it never happens, you'll avoid too much disappointment - then again, with dedicated Kojima fans like the guys behind the Policenauts fan translation around (see box out), even if Konami don't translate it themselves, we may yet get to listen in on the latest Snatcher adventure!

a small enough community that we all kind of knew each other, because we had all worked together before."

"I do remember the studio very vividly." Continues Lucy. "It was a large room and we each had our own microphone stand. It was a lot like being in a play."

"It was also a really long gig." Recalls Lucy. "I remember that it lasted an entire week, which is unusual. Usually for a voice over job you're there for five minutes, they pay you a lot of money, and then you leave – but Snatcher was special."

"It was really fun." Agrees Jeff. "We were in there with some very good voice people, who could really knock out some great character voices... and we were in there for a whole week, so I really got a chance to flesh out my character."

While Hideo Kojima was the creator of Snatcher, there is no documented evidence that he personally supervised the Chicago recording sessions. Indeed, it seems unlikely that he could afford to take a week from his busy schedule, since in early 1994 he was also deep into development on Policenauts, a spiritual sequel of sorts to Snatcher.

Instead, the English Language direction was probably done by Yoshinori Sasaki, who is listed as being the director of the Sega CD version of Snatcher. Nevertheless, both Jef Lupetin and Lucy Childs remember several Konami representatives being present, as well as a young, unidentified, Japanese director.

"There were two young Japanese guys there giving us directions, and one of them may have been him [Hideo Kojima]." Remembers Jeff. "The director was definitely in the middle of it. He talked us through the entire game and he was definitely instrumental in keeping or performances consistent and setting the scene."

"I do remember a Japanese director being there." Agrees Lucy. "They had hired an American engineer, but the Japanese gentleman gave us a lot of input on our performances. I don't think he directed the entire game, but he definitely had a lot of input."

"He talked a lot about the story and the mood of the game, as well as telling us exactly what he wanted to accomplish in certain scenes." Continues Lucy. "Then he would show clips of the game to give us an idea of what our characters looked like, what they were doing and stuff like that. That inspired us to hone our character's voices."

SNATCHER FAILS

Until now neither Jeff nor Lucy had ever been interviewed about their part in creating one of the most noteworthy videogames in the industry's history and indeed, in the thirteen-odd years since they worked on Snatcher, they had rarely even been reminded that the game ever existed.

"I remember specifically asking if I could get a copy of the game, because it looked like fun and I wanted to play it." Says Lucy. "They kinda just said no."

"I also remember that for a few months after I did Snatcher I would go looking for it in stores, but I never found it." Continues Lucy. "I've never even seen it... In fact, I've heard absolutely nothing about it until you contacted me for this interview."

Similarly, Jeff Lupetin went for years having never seen a copy of Snatcher, let alone actually getting to play the game.

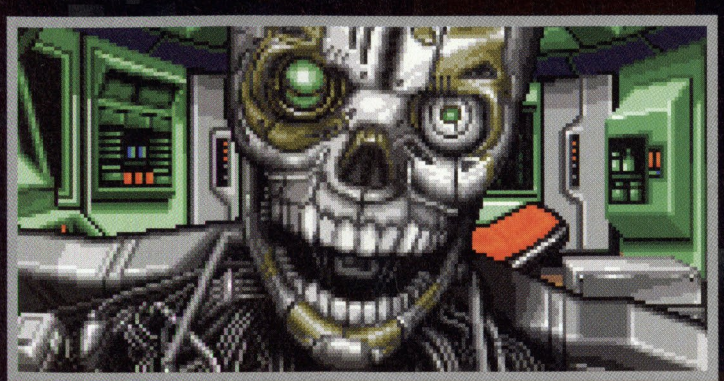
"I always used to ask the studio if they ever heard anything about Snatcher but they never did." Says Jeff Lupetin. "It's not like I was really dwelling on it but I thought that this thing was so unique, and since I had such a large part in it, I thought that I should be able to see it in the stores and get a copy of it – but none of that ever happened."

"There was so much effort and energy that went into Snatcher and it didn't feel like some trifling little game." Continues Lupetin. "It seemed like such a big deal at the time, so to have it just disappear like that was disappointing."

Indeed, Snatcher was a flop. Few people ever saw the game, and even fewer played it thanks to a variety of factors. First there was the fact that the public's interest in Sega's Mega CD console was waning. The console never really found a market to begin with, and with so many games on the system that promised "cinematic" experiences turning out to be little more than interactive full-motion video, Snatcher's cinematic approach to adventure was surely lost in the throng.

Furthermore, the game was released in minuscule quantities with virtually no marketing support behind it, practically sealing its fate.

Thirteen years later though, and things are certainly different...



CULT SUCCESS

In the years since Snatcher first met its unfortunate fate a lot has changed. Hideo Kojima, once unknown outside Japan, is now internationally renowned and considered to be one of the pre-eminent game directors in the world. Thanks to the success of his most popular series, Metal Gear Solid, Kojima has ascended to the status of auteur game director, something that soon sparked interest in his older, less appreciated works. Of these, Snatcher is invariably considered the best.

"I think it was about two or three years ago." Says Lupetin of the first time he discovered that Snatcher had become a cult favourite. "I started to get emails from a lot of people I didn't know, telling me how much they enjoyed the game and how much they liked my character."

"It was kinda weird though," continues Lupetin, "because everyone I talked to about Snatcher knew more about it than I do [laughs]... but I'm glad to hear all these years later that people have gotten enjoyment out of it. I think it's terrific."

"[Snatcher's cult status] is incredibly rewarding," agrees Lucy Childs, "not just for myself, but it's fascinating to me is that the whole project is really valued."

"For something like Snatcher, that was so innovative in its time, to sort of die a little death and then be resurrected years later is wonderful." Continues Lucy. "It makes me proud to be part of it."

Today Snatcher's popularity is at its peak. The game's rarity and status as a collector's item have made it an eBay favourite, with copies of the Mega CD version regularly fetching unfeasibly high prices in online auctions. Meanwhile, advances in emulation software have meant that anyone willing to flout copyright law can have the game up and running on their home PC.

While that may not be an ideal situation for Konami (the ideal situation, of course, would be that they had a copy of Snatcher on store shelves to buy), the fact that more people than ever before are playing Snatcher thirteen years after its initial release will have to be good for business when the inevitable sequel rolls around – and by the looks of it that may be sooner rather than later...

ZOMBIE VERSUS SNATCHER

Rumours of a return to the Snatcher-infested streets of Neo Kobe city have been circulating for years, but one Saturday in April those rumours became reality.

At Zombie Versus Snake, a videogame developer's conference held by Goichi Suda and featuring a guest appearance by Hideo Kojima, the first details of a mysterious "Project S" were tentatively revealed. The two game directors playfully hinted that they had a Snatcher-related project in the works, but stopped short of actually revealing their plans. Instead they decided to announce the truth behind the "S" in Project S on Hideo Kojima's next Hidechan Radio Internet broadcast. In the audio blog Kojima revealed that Snatcher would be returning in a variety of mediums, the first of which would be a radio drama, written and directed by Goichi Suda. Kojima affectionately called the audio play "Sudatcher", a title he got by combining Suda's name with Snatcher, but the official title of the project is reported to be "Snatchers". This first foray back into the world of Snatcher is one of many however, with Kojima and Suda promising that the series would be revived in a variety of mediums, and among those the prospect of a new game in the series is easily the most exciting.

Should the characters of Gillian Seed and Metal Gear Mk.II make a comeback in future Snatcher adventures, both Jeff Lupetin and Lucy Childs would be more than happy to step back into their respective roles.

"I'd love to do it again, it would be a blast!" says Lucy Childs of a potential return to the role of Metal Gear. "And I would wager that everybody else from the game's original cast would want to do it too."

At least one other cast member, Jeff Lupetin, feels the same way.

"Oh yeah, absolutely. I'd love it." enthuses Jeff. "Gillian was such a great character, and it would be fun on a lot of levels. My voice is pretty much the same as it was back then, and from what I've learned in the business over the years I think I'd do a hell of a lot better job if I did him again now."

"I'm in." He continues. "If they want to do another Snatcher I hope they track me down."

We hope so too. >>

THE FUTURE

Apart from a potential return to their roles as Gillian Seed and Metal Gear Mk.II what will the voices of Snatcher be doing with themselves in the future?

"I'll continue doing voice work." Says Lupetin. "I'll do commercial work, I'm teaching and I'm writing a book about voice acting."

"I've also recent made my own audio CD full of my own stories," continues Jeff. "I grew up in New York and I lived on the same street as Sing Sing prison. So I have an CD out called 'Thirteen Houses from Sing Sing' which is filled with the stories of me growing up next to Sing Sing."

You can check out Jeff's latest projects on his website: www.loopytalk.com

Meanwhile, Lucy Childs is now a literary agent in for a New York firm.

"I'm simply putting two kids through college and reading all the time and trying to represent books to publishers now," says Lucy. "My husband is an actor, so I'm still looking on at the industry."

"The older I get the more I think I might go back to acting," she continues. "The older you are the more roles there are because the attrition rate is so high, people drop out, just like I did. So maybe when I'm sixty I'll go back to being in the business again."

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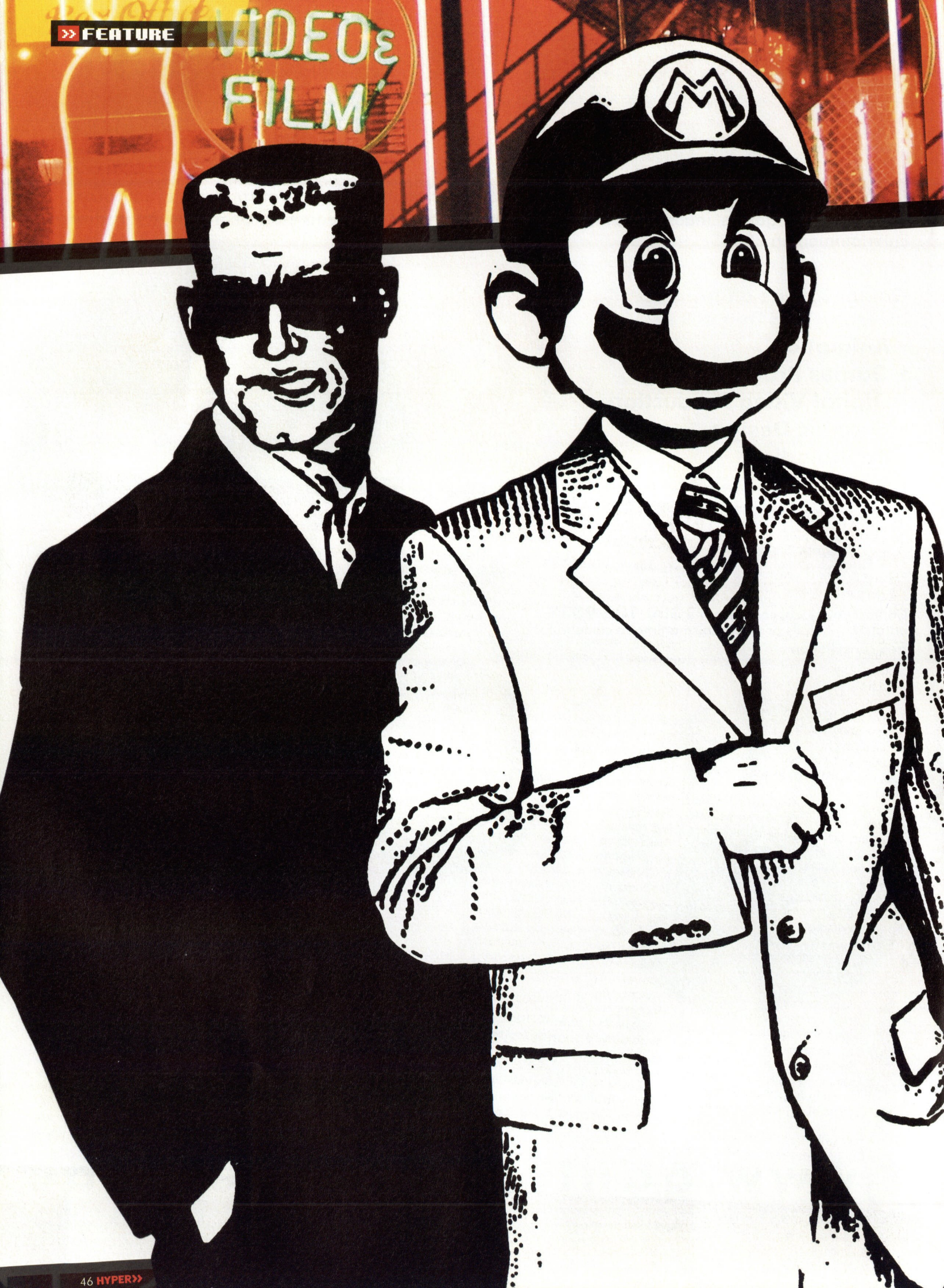

VIDEO
FILM

ARE GAMES GROWING UP?

By Yahtzee Croshaw

I don't think anyone could genuinely argue that video games are not mature in the most basic sense of the word, unless they had their eyes shut and their fingers in their ears. If we take 'mature' to mean steeped in blood, sex and tits from top to tail then gaming has had 'maturity' covered for decades.

But I think it's important to remember that the word 'mature' can be interpreted in many different ways, and that one of those ways is 'civilised'. 'Artistically valid'. 'Grown-up'.

Because, let's be honest. While they wear the R18+ sticker without shame, ridiculously violent games are... rather childish, ironically. Slicing off limbs and gouging out eyes in a Story of Ricky-esque ballet of steaming gore is the kind of thing that gets mentioned in hushed tones of awe on the school playground but will yield only disturbed silence around the office water cooler. Similarly, pictures of improbably-proportioned young women in lurid poses and strategically absent battle dress may quicken the pulses of teenage boys, under the bedcovers with a flashlight and a thin sheen of sweat, but lusting after them beyond the age of 18, while by no means uncommon, you should probably be ashamed of.

What I'm trying to say is that for a long time gaming has been looked down upon as an art form due to being largely preoccupied with space aliens, shooting said space aliens, and admiring the breasts of their females. But now that we're mid-way through the gaming renaissance, are things changing?

VIOLENCE

Pointing a gun at an enemy and holding down the fire button until one or both of you no longer exist is arguably the most prevalent scenario in gaming, but it's only recently that games also started showing us the true consequences and associations of battle. Back in Space Invaders days enemy ships were destroyed with a single blip, a disappearance, and 200 points. No bloated, vacuum-exposed alien corpses were seen drifting from the wreckage. No alien wives and mothers were seen tearfully opening letters on army letterhead. And while even today you don't generally get anything like that, violence does come with a whole lot more baggage than before.

Consider a game like Soldier of Fortune. A fairly typical first person shooter that made a big thing of a new bodily injury system. In what was new for the time, shooting an enemy in a body part would cause that body part to react appropriately. A shotgun blast in the right place, for example, could potentially sever an arm or a leg. And afterwards, the enemy in question would also react appropriately, i.e. fall to what remains of their knees and wail like newborns. And that's where action-packed excitement takes a turn for the tragic, because now the game is making me feel guilty about blowing away the bad guys.

Perhaps that was just me, though, because Soldier of Fortune relished the violence somewhat - this was the game that kept track of how many times you shot off an enemy soldier's goolies, for christ's sake - so a better example might be the original Postal. While you were invited to gun down barely dangerous civilians in cold blood, the civilians would then writhe around for ages, paradoxically constantly complaining about their breathing difficulties, until you actively slap a muzzle against their temples and blow the mothers away. It was a game that actually made you feel guilty about doing what had always come naturally to gamers, and when you couldn't take anymore there was an even a command for turning the gun on yourself.

While Postal certainly isn't going to be remembered for centuries as a landmark title, it sits roughly on a transitionary point when violence was becoming more realistic. Gunning down innocents was almost charming in cartoonish 2D titles but as technology improved it started becoming distasteful.

These days violence in games has changed. It has consequences. Look at Grand Theft Auto - all of a sudden we've beamed down to Planet Sensible where you can actually get ARRESTED for murder. Pumping unarmed civilians in most new FPSes is a highway to getting yelled at by your support character. Most new games rely on aliens, mutants and demons to reduce the guilt factor while those that stick with humans do so as part of an intentionally gritty artistic direction.

Wartime games are a good example. We've long since moved on from the cartoon silliness of games like Wolfenstein and have graduated to the like of Battlefield 1942 and Call of Duty, that attempt to represent the horrors of war with more realism than ever before.

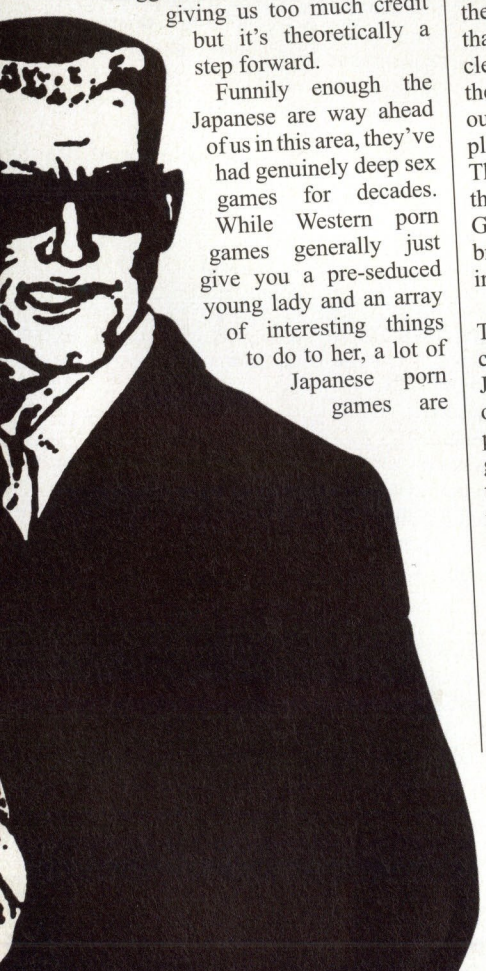
SEX

Games having an increasingly mature attitude towards sex is something that's going to be pretty difficult to argue. For the longest time, sex in games has been very firmly entrenched in the territory of playground giggles. There have been pornographic games in every period of gaming history, starting with the truly shameful Custer's Revenge on the Atari 2600. The thing about these, though, is that they're solely concerned about sex. The randy pile of humping pixels

that represent General Custer has no concerns besides guiding body part A into body part B.

But now games are becoming more cinematic, and more and more we see appearances of sex and nudity in games as a storytelling device rather than titillation. God of War is chock full of boobs and ladies being ravished but this is to establish the setting and the brutality of the main character. When the Prince of Persia gets his mack on in Sands of Time it's to convey the evolution of his personality. And when characters in Fahrenheit: Indigo Prophecy did the mattress mambo it was to communicate to the audience that the designers had gone completely insane.

It's nice to see that developers respect us enough as players to let us see this sort of thing without self-conscious sophomoric pointing and sniggering. In some cases this is giving us too much credit but it's theoretically a step forward.



Funnily enough the Japanese are way ahead of us in this area, they've had genuinely deep sex games for decades. While Western porn games generally just give you a pre-seduced young lady and an array of interesting things to do to her, a lot of Japanese porn games are more like interactive fiction, with plot and characterisation to help contextualise the boffing. And while a lot of these games are kind of shallow, some of them really make you work hard to unlock the action. Er… or at least, that's what my pathetic friends tell me.

Moving hastily on, inseparable from sex is its kissing cousin sex appeal, which brings us back to boobs. Contrary to everything else in this article, this may be the area that has been steadily losing maturity ever since Ms. Pacman broke new ground in gender relations. It seems there's a new game out every year that experiments with how much cleavage it can get away with and there's a lot of promotional artwork out there that wouldn't be out of place in a Boris Vallejo portfolio. There's a piece of concept art for the long-abandoned Starcraft: Ghost project floating around that brings the concept of 'skintight' into a whole other dimension.

Some progress has been made. There are some strong, frumpily clad female characters around like Jade from Beyond Good & Evil, or Alyx from Half-Life 2, or the protagonists of the Longest Journey games. They're far outweighed by the drooling moron princesses that need rescuing and the tired old 'big titted tough lady with big guns' archetype, but in our defense it's no worse than in the film industry.

ARTISTIC INTEGRITY

These days games have the technology to render everything down to the microscopic bacteria on the feelers of the ant crawling on a blade of grass in the middle of a football field, but this isn't inherently a good thing. Constantly trying to keep up with the latest developments in graphics tends to be detrimental to creativity.

Whenever there's a new step forward in technology, a game comes out to showcase it. That's always been the case and that's always going to be the case, but these games are often so concerned with showing off their new bells and whistles that innovation in story and art takes a back seat.

"CONSTANTLY TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN GRAPHICS TENDS TO BE DETRIMENTAL TO CREATIVITY."

Funnily enough, these jumped-up tech demos are almost invariably first person shooters. Quake 1 was one of the first full 3D polygon games, but was pretty much just bog standard monster hunting on the express train to brown town. Doom 3? Normal mapping and monster hunting in space. Prey? Portals, gravity effects and monster hunting in space. Half-Life 2 admittedly mixed things up with its signature storytelling methods but was still just a little bit too in love with its physics engine and bloom lighting. And monster hunting.

But the really artistic games, the ones that stand out as true explorations of the medium, have tended to be rather light on the processing requirements side. Consider Grim Fandango with its pre-rendered backgrounds in a time of full 3D. Shadow of the Colossus with its big, empty, lonely scenery. Okami, released for a last generation console. Developers are starting to realise that not straining themselves to be at the cutting edge makes it more interesting to see what can be achieved with the tools they have.

The popularity of handhelds also attests to this. New 2D games are coming out for the PSP and the DS that wouldn't have taxed a SNES. Graphics aren't going to get much better than they are now and making them top of the range requires more manpower and resources than most people will find practical, so now that we're slowing down in our twenty year mad adolescent rush for the best graphics ever, we can take a moment to reflect. 2D handheld games aren't a step backwards; they're a sign of a change in perspective.

It's like people who make TV versus people who make movies. TV series tend to have lower budgets but more time to express themselves, so it tends to breed high quality serial drama like Lost, Battlestar Galactica, Rome and so on. Meanwhile the movie making people have fifty squillion dollars and the resources of NASA to make two hours of mindless escapism for the popcorn gargling masses, and they output an awful lot of very nice-looking but ultimately shallow thrills. But neither blockbuster film nor low-budget TV is 'better' than the other – they're just different ways of telling a story.

Video games are a new form of artistic expression. It's kind of been held back a lot by killjoys but the good news is that most of those killjoys are old and will soon die, leaving us, the younger generation, to pass on our values. The same thing happened with comic books, with films, with theatre, even with novels at one point, so like it or not, video games will eventually become a validated part of human art and culture.

I'm not saying that gaming has wholly grown out of its adolescence. One need only point out the continuation of the Dead or Alive Xtreme series to refute that. I'm not even saying that graphics can't possibly be improved any further. But things have reached a point where the technology is capable of fulfilling all the developers' wildest ideas, and ultimately that's all anyone could need.

The face of video games is changing. Its acne is clearing up. >>

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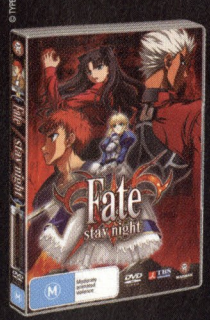

Shirou must come to grips with the reality of the secret world of war mages and their summoned servants when he unknowingly summons his own servant, Saber; the one said to be the most powerful servant of them all.

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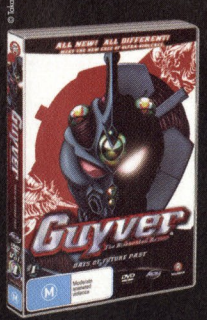

Sho Fukamachi happens upon a techno organic suit of bio armor known as the Guyver. Sho is soon forced to call upon the fearsome power of the Guyver, and rip his opponents limb from limb in a desperate struggle for survival.

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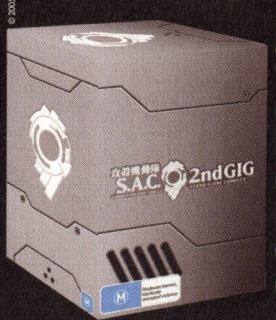

After being reinstated, Section 9 must stop an assassin who is killing high-ranking officials, outmaneuver an incredibly talented thief, and unravel the reason a high-tech helicopter malfunctioned.

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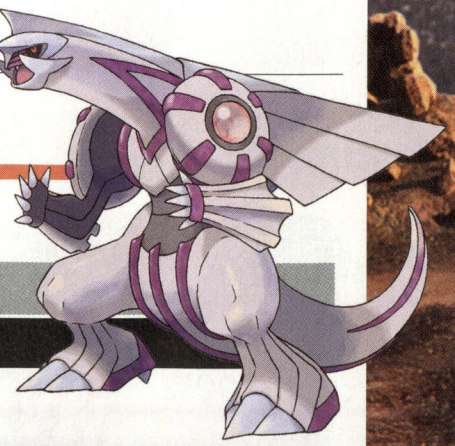
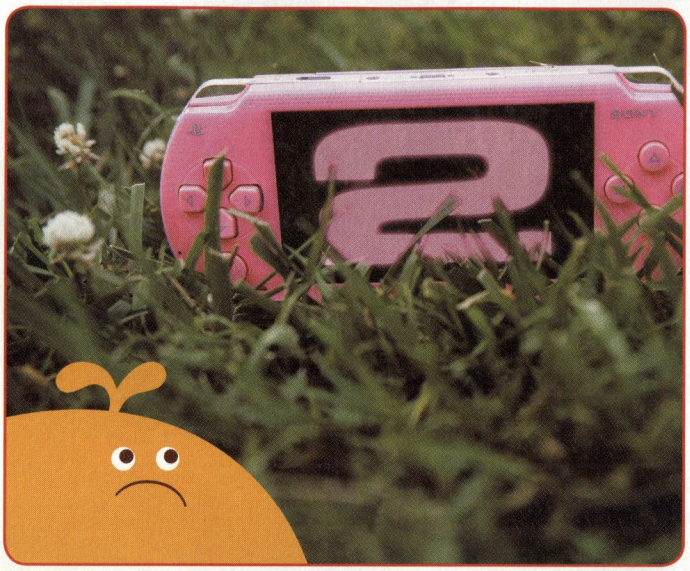
Reviews

WAR GAMES

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE



PSP Has Too Many Sequels



In the now infamous words of Jeff Minter, "Just making the shiniest, most expensive hardware doesn't cut it these days". As the founder of Llamasoft and creator of such classic games as Attack of the Mutant Camels, Llamatron and Tempest 2000, Minter is more than qualified to offer his opinion on the industry around him, and in this case he was referring to the uphill battle faced by Sony's foray into the world of handheld gaming, the PlayStation Portable.

"Sure, the PSP was beautiful, shining, pretty and posh," continued Minter. "Whereas the DS was definitely the ugly sister. But hey, the ugly sister is better in the sack."

In the year since Minter first made these remarks, it has become obvious that when it comes to settling down with a handheld console, the so-called ugly sister is definitely getting the most attention.

According to Japanese market research firm Media Create, the DS is outselling the PSP at a rate of thee to one, while in the USA the DS has sold a staggering 35.6 million consoles, compared with the PSP's 7.2 million (from NPD).

The rift between the two consoles is already insurmountable for Sony's handheld, and only looks to increase in the coming months and years.

The real question, of course, is what is causing this seeming lack of interest in a console that seemed to have it all – stylish design, a gorgeous screen and considerable support from both the development community and from Sony itself. Is the hardware or the software to blame, or both?

One game developer who seems to believe the PSP's software is the culprit is Tsutomu Kouno, the creator of one of the PSP's most original games to date, LocoRoco.

At this month's Nordic Game Conference, held in Malmö, Sweden, Kouno discussed the future of the portable PlayStation. According to gameindustry.biz, Kouno criticised the PSP's lack of original games, saying; "We need to make more new games for PSP, not just sequels. We have to increase the number of casual games – games that LocoRoco players will want to play."

Kouno's statements are somewhat ironic, given that at the same conference he also said of his forthcoming LocoRoco sequel, "It's basically the same [as the first LocoRoco], but I've also added something new. There aren't too many system changes, but we created new AI and new gimmicks with the physics calculations."

The predicament that PSP finds itself in then, is one where even a game developer who is willing to speak out against the PSP's overwhelming library of ports and sequels, is still preparing to add yet another all-too-familiar sequel to the ever-growing pile.

Kouno does have a point though. The PSP does need more interesting games to capture the attention of gamers already wowed by casual games like Nintendogs, Trauma Centre, Cooking Mama, Brain Training and more on the DS.

Then again, a hardware upgrade that improved the PSP's d-pad and power consumption troubles would be more than welcome as well, but that's an argument for another time...

The Hyper Scoring System - *What's It All About?*

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Super Paper Mario [IMPORT]

JONTI DAVIES gets his paperweights ready.

category: **Platform RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **Intelligent Systems**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **¥5800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**

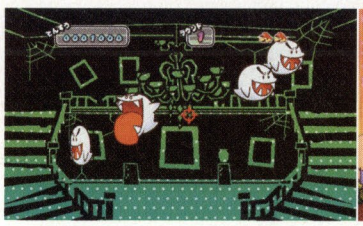
The Paper Mario series has an interesting back-story; the whole enterprise began on the SNES when Nintendo and Squaresoft co-developed the isometric beauty that is Super Paper Mario RPG. That game was never released in PAL territories (though we live in hope of a global Virtual Console release) and we had to wait five years for the Intelligent Systems-developed spiritual successor, 2001's Paper Mario on the N64. This is where the concept of Mario (and all other characters) being paper-thin in a 3D world first appeared. It was an immediate success, Nintendo decided that it merited a PAL conversion, and so the modern-day Paper series was born.

CUBIC

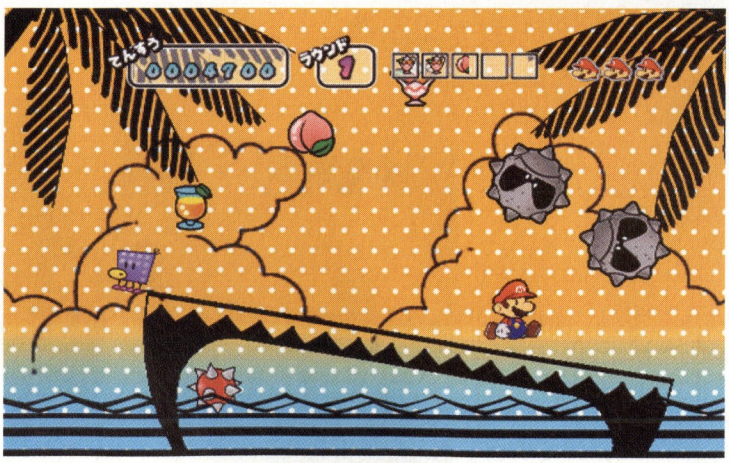
Super Paper Mario was originally destined for the GameCube, of course, and it's clear that – much in the same way as Twilight Princess – this is a GameCube game with novel extras to suit the Wii controller. In Twilight Princess, however, those novelties increased the level of player involvement. Here, they feel like tacked-on gimmicks: point the controller at the screen and it'll light up an area of the screen as would a magic torch, making visible previously hidden items. A lot of the time, you just have to guess when this feature should be used. It feels unnecessary and adds nothing to the experience.

Another disappointment is that Super Paper Mario, like Fire Emblem on the Wii, forces you to use the Wii Remote in a horizontal hold – yeah, it feels like a NES controller, but the NES pad made our hands hurt because of its sharp angles. In this position, so does the Wii Remote. We want to use the Classic Controller, but we can't – presumably only because of the Remote-based gimmicks introduced here – and so the whole control system is compromised.

Of course, Super Paper Mario initially gives no indication of these frustrations. It all kicks off with a very pretty introductory cutscene (albeit an overlong one) and the game world looks awesome. There are plenty of references to Mario's heritage – collect a special mushroom power-up, for example, and Mario will become a screen-filling giant version of his pixilated 8-bit self – but there are also new enemies and level settings that keep things fresh. For Mario fans, Super Paper Mario has an abundance of visual riches – this is the kind of lush Mushroom Kingdom that we're happy to soak our eyes in and go tripping through. It's Super Mario Bros. and Super Mario

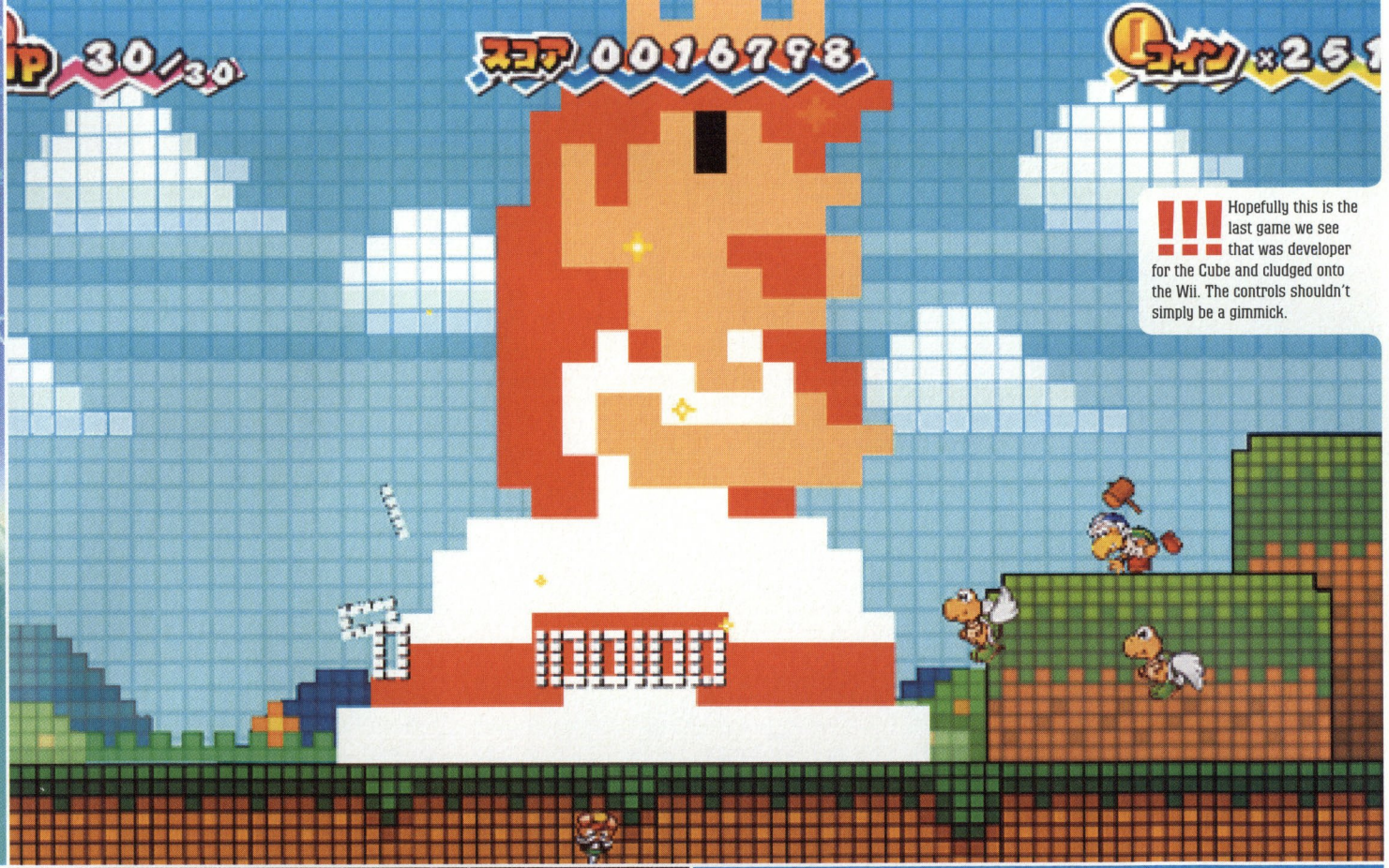


[above] Does Peach still only offer "cake"?



[below] Pastel brilliance

INSTANT DEATH? Boss characters in Super Paper Mario have considerable amounts of energy, but so does Mario. There's no threat of instant death, which although faithful to the game's RPG origins, results in fairly stale battles. Compared with the final battle against Bowser in Super Mario 64, for example, there's nothing here that has the same level of drama and danger. The same goes for the 'jumping on goombas' heads' play in the main areas of Super Paper Mario's levels: even if you walk into a goomba by mistake, unless your energy has been depleted to almost zero and you have nothing left in your inventory, you will not die. Frankly, we wish we could die more often.



!!! Hopefully this is the last game we see that was developer for the Cube and cludged onto the Wii. The controls shouldn't simply be a gimmick.

Bowser-Type

* SPARTAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

World merged, level-upped, and regurgitated as a graphical fireball from the mouth of a piranha plant.

It's just as well that Super Paper Mario has such visual impact, though, because on a gameplay level it doesn't quite make the grade we've come to expect from Intelligent Systems' takes on the Mario universe. Where genuine Super Mario platformers flow from level start to level end, and Mario's feet carry him along with tangible inertia that makes jumping gaps one of life's great joys, Super Paper Mario is constantly stopping and restarting – and Mario's shoes have too much grip to give us a run-and-jump thrill. Viewed as an RPG, Super Paper Mario can be seen more favourably: it has a story (even though it's a clichéd one) that is told with great humour and a knowing sense of irony that few other RPGs can pull off.

One of the most intriguing features here is the ability to switch, in real-time, from a side-on 2D perspective to a 3D viewpoint. It's not 3D in the free-roaming Super Mario 64/Sunshine sense, but more along the tracks of Crash Bandicoot's tunneled 3D. Besides satisfying our curiosity ("How would this look in 3D? Oh!"), this option introduces a number of gameplay features: blocks that appear to be perfectly parallel in 2D are often aligned at tangents when seen in 3D, and this at times will provide you with a new path to a higher level. At other times, previously invisible passages will appear, giving you a way out of (or into) an area. Along with the Wii Remote's torch functionality, the 2D/3D thing gives Super Paper Mario something of a split personality – it's interesting (and, indeed, essential) to explore both sides of the game as you progress, but after a while it becomes less of a pleasure and more of a burden. Innovative? Yes. Fun? Not really.

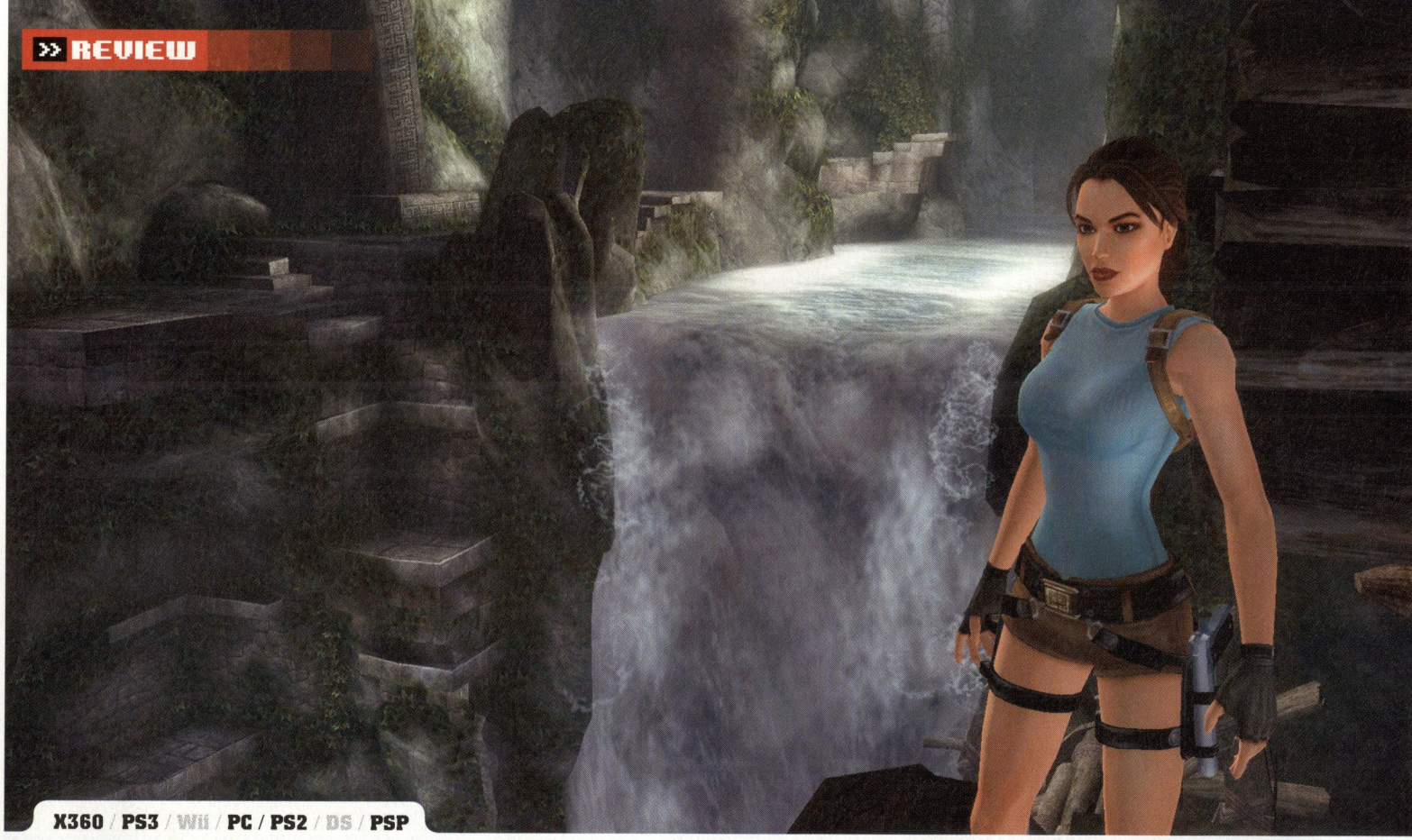
Although Super Paper Mario isn't the 100% fun experience we had been anticipating, it can be satisfying. There's plenty of game - and as you collect all of the cards and items available and speak to the game's hundreds of colourful characters, the game world becomes complete around you. For players who primarily like to clear objectives, there's no prettier way to get your fill. For fans of Mario platformers and the hardcore RPG crowd, though, Super Paper Mario is neither one thing nor another. Next time out, Intelligent Systems should shred their current concept and start with a fresh sheet of A4. <<

» It's just as well that SPM has such visual impact, because on a gameplay level it doesn't quite make the grade

Looks gorgeous; plenty of character; innovative 2D/3D engine	Remote function seems pointless; running/jumping isn't much fun	HYPER VERDICT

Visually charming and innovative in places, but not as fun as it should be

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
93	90	75	77



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

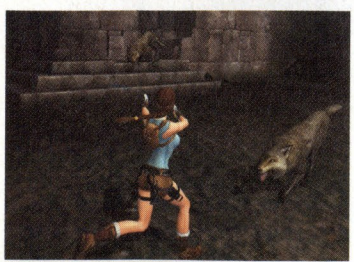
Tomb Raider: Anniversary

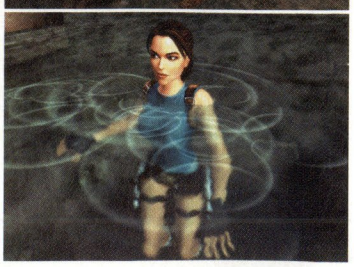
DANIEL WILKS X...CRAP! X, Triangle...CRAP! X, Triangle, R1...CRAP!

category: **Action**
players: **1**
developer: **Crystal Dynamics**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Celebrating the 11th anniversary of the Tomb Raider franchise by going back and remaking the original game with features taken from other games in the franchise must have sounded like a rather risky proposition when the team at Crystal Dynamics first pitched it. We can only imagine some money men sitting in a dark room sipping single malt and lighting cigars with £100 bills cynically asking why the development team didn't simply pitch the idea of putting the original game in a collector's box along side a DVD of talking heads spouting the merits of the game and maybe a couple of photo-shoots of the various models who have posed as Lara Croft over the years, in a tasteful state of undress, of course. Why go back and remake a perfectly good, if somewhat polygonal, wheel? Well, it appears that such questions will have to be left to the ages. Tomb Raider: Anniversary is here, remaking the original for the new generation. Or something like that anyway.

It's no secret that we loved Tomb Raider: Legend – pretty much everyone who works on the mag has slavishly finished the game. When I say slavishly I mean spent hours completing everything and 100%ing the Croft Manor, arguably the best new feature in the game in a long time; a long and intricate series of interconnected puzzles that can be approached slowly, rationally and without fear of being killed by traps, camera angles, critters you can't target or invisible deadfalls. Thankfully the Manor has made a return, eating up hours of our time as we ponder over dozens of clever item and movement puzzles. We'll get to that later. First we should tackle the main game.





[below] Nothing like a hot-tub after killing endangered species

MORE TRIAL, LESS ERROR

If you could sum up Tomb Raider: Anniversary in three words it would be something along the lines of "Rad!" closely followed by an exasperated, "kill me". There is a hell of a lot of goodness to be found in the game; many of the movement puzzles in the game are sublime, the new engine is very pretty, the animations are great and the levels are absolutely huge. Unfortunately much of the goodness seems to be balanced out with frustration and annoyance; the quick-time button mashing events quickly become very tiresome, the trial and error puzzle solving makes you want to pull your hair out, the camera has definite issues and the size of the levels can often leave you totally lost, not knowing what you need to do to progress.

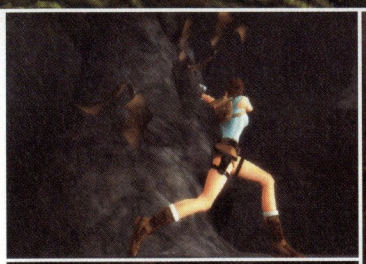
[above] Lara fails to realise the advantage of having guns

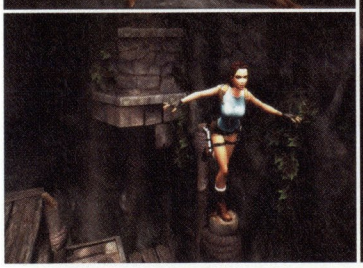
Each of the levels in Anniversary thoroughly dwarfs any of those seen in the original Tomb Raider with individual elements of puzzles often being larger than the entire level in the original. It's quite exhilarating to see the sheer size of a movement puzzle, to look into the far distance and see a ledge you know you're going to have to climb to and then start working out how you're going to achieve such a feat. Working out how to get from one place to the next is fun, figuring out the arcane combination of jumps, wall runs,

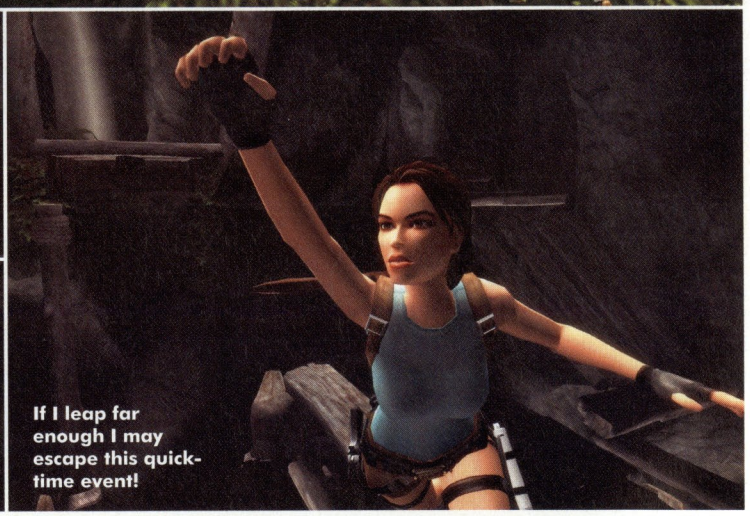
TO THE MANOR BORN Croft Manor returns once again and it's brilliant. A long sequence of puzzles that can be approached in your own time give the manor a thoughtful feel when compared to the m ore action oriented levels within the game proper. Crystal Dynamics – we're begging you; next time you make a Tomb Raider game can you make it all like the manor? Just a series of well thought out movement and item puzzles in an environment that expands as you unlock other areas by completing puzzles, encouraging players to go back to areas they have already been with the skill they unlock to find hidden areas and the like? That would be awesome.

!!! Instant death traps that are hard to avoid due to the camera switching perspective at inopportune times is something else to look forward to.

rolls and death defying leaps it takes to find the hidden items and artifacts is a blast. Unfortunately due to the structuring of the game the scale can also work against the fun. Much like the original game, most of the levels in Tomb Raider: Anniversary work around an adventure hub idea; one centralized location from which all of the puzzle areas of the level branch. Now that each of the individual elements are bigger than an entire puzzle in the original game it is all too easy to get lost in the mess of corridors, rooms, pits and pools, many of which look frighteningly alike due to some rather lazy texturing.







If I leap far enough I may escape this quick-time event!

[above] Bats, Bums and Boobs

FASTEST THUMBS IN THE WEST

And then there are the interactive cutscenes. We didn't necessarily laud their praises in Legend but the cutscenes that required the player to match buttons to on screen prompts worked fairly well as a means to draw the player into an otherwise pre-rendered cutscene. It was fairly cool. Not anymore. Every boss battle, action sequence and cutscene seems to require the player to match some buttons. Whilst this is initially entertaining it loses its charm a few hours into the game and about 10 hours before it commits the ultimate sin. Now I'm not claiming to be the most agile person in the world or to have the fastest reflexes but I've always been fairly good at button matching – Parappa, God of War, Um Jammer Lammy and the like are not exactly my bitches but I have been known to make them show certain bitch-like tendencies. They mixed challenge and satisfaction, never punishing you for missing a beat and giving you enough of a window to get through without it being either too painfully hard or too easy. Not so with Anniversary. As the game progresses the window for button presses shrinks dramatically until the only real way to get through is trial and error, dying time and time again to learn the next button in the sequence; fail one and the entire cutscene reloads and you start from the beginning again. After a loading screen that is.

» ultimately Tomb Raider Anniversary is one of those games that gets worse the more you play it

Camera issues seem to abound in most third person action games to some varying degree and Anniversary is no exception and the camera flaws are especially punishing. In a game where making desperate leaps for distant platform is par for the course having a camera that gets stuck on terrain and will often occlude the view of where you are trying to go is somewhat detrimental to say the least.

It's such a pity to devote more page space to the negative than the positive in a review but thems the breaks. There is a lot of good stuff to be had in Anniversary – many of the stages are brilliantly designed, some of the puzzles are ingenious (manipulating water levels to reach different platforms springs to mind), the grapple is still a joy to use and the wall running maneuver is brilliant and superbly animated – but ultimately it's one of those games that gets worse the more you play it; what starts out as brilliant and addictive slowly begins to show its flaws, all of which compound to frustrate by the end, and frustrate more than they entertain. <<

Fantastic animations, some brilliant levels, some great puzzles	Camera issues, hard to get bearings, trial and error gameplay	HYPER VERDICT
Starts fantastically but stumbles towards the finish	VISUALS 80 · SOUND 86 · GAMEPLAY 88	74

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / DS / PSP

Rogue Galaxy

Warning! A **DAN STAINES** appears!

category: **RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **Level-5**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **TBC**
available: **June 30**

Although it suffers from a variety of obvious defects, some of which border on debilitating, it's hard to dislike a game like Rogue Galaxy. Like a lot of JRPGs, and especially Level-5's own Dragon Quest VIII, it's one of those games that you could sit down and play for hours without ever really enjoying yourself. Neither unpleasant nor fun, it's a classic timesink: there's always some trinket to find or weapon to level-up, and it's almost impossible to get lost or stuck, so you just keep playing and playing and playing. Case in point: I've only had the thing for a week and already I've put in forty-hours. That's more time than I've spent sleeping, for God's sake.

[below] When teenage mutant turtles go bad.

MEESA HATE YOU SO MUCH

As is often the case with games in this genre, Rogue Galaxy's story is a mélange of pop-culture clichés, most of which can be traced back to Star Wars and classic anime like Astro Boy. It's a simple tale told with earnest simplicity, and although it's rarely engaging, at least it's easy to ignore should you get sick of it. Plus, the CGI cut-scenes are very pretty, so you can enjoy watching them even if you don't give a crap about what's going on.

At any rate, even if you do manage to wring a few drops of satisfaction from the parched narrative, you'll almost certainly hate the characters it revolves around, most of which are annoying stereotypes stolen straight out of the Lucasfilm archives. Look at what we've got here: a headstrong orphan destined to become a hero, a self-interested but irresistibly cool mercenary, a flailing robot programmed to act like a mincing homosexual – there's even a little blue Jar Jar Binks. But where the original Jar Jar was brain-damaged and mildly racist, this guy (whose name is Jupis Tooki) is just loud and obnoxious. You know, sometimes I put him in my party just so I can sit back and watch him be killed by monsters, such is the depth of my hatred for him. And honestly? The other characters aren't much better.

But what Rogue Galaxy lacks in a decent story and characters is more than made up for in overall polish. Level-5's penchant for fastidious perfectionism finds full expression here and the result is a game that sparkles with dozens of shiny little details and flourishes – small touches that mean nothing individually, but in aggregate have a significant impact on the game. Like how the loading screen comes with a brief synopsis of where the story was at last time you played. Also, the way in which you're allowed to teleport freely between save-points on the same planet. These aren't necessary features, or even very noticeable, but they're nice. They're there to make Rogue Galaxy just that little bit more enjoyable, and in that regard, they succeed admirably.

[above] "Beetle to Butterfly seven. Checkmate I believe."

RANDOM IDIOCY

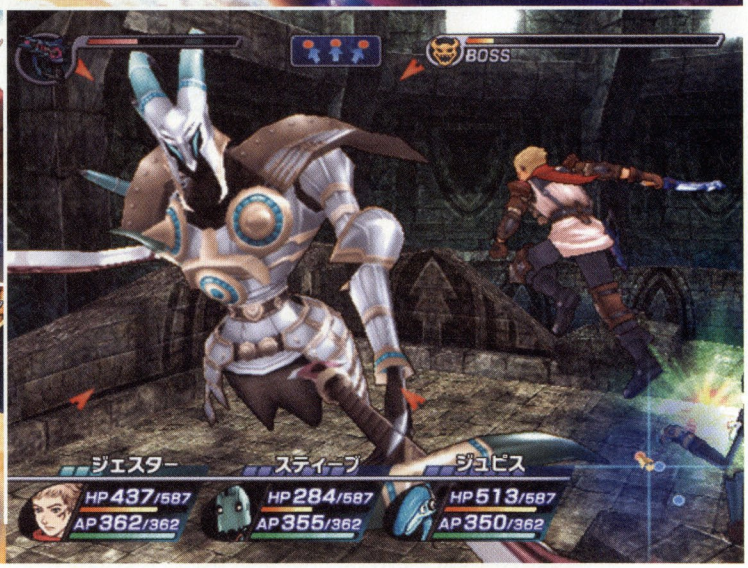
Sadly though, a lot of Level-5's good work in making Rogue Galaxy a pleasant game to play is let down in their bizarre decision to include random encounters. I say the choice is bizarre because the very idea of random encounters contrasts completely with the rest of the game's design-philosophy.

THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION One of Rogue Galaxy's greatest strengths is the way it handles items and crafting. Whereas in most RPGs getting a better weapon means either finding or buying it, in this game you can combine your old weapons to make new and better ones. And on top of that, you also have a factory where you can combine various recipes of multiple items to make new items that are then shipped to stores for purchase. Using the factory is actually one of the most fun parts of the game – it's like a stripped-down version of The Incredible Machine!

!!! – Rogue Galaxy stars a number of familiar and talented voice-actors, including Kari Wahlgren (Ashe from FFXII), Steven Blum (Vincent Valentine), and Yuri Lowenthal (The Prince of Persia).

Why go to all that length to make your game pleasant to play if you're going to use a play mechanic widely reviled for its capacity to annoy? And trust me: the random battles are annoying. Like we said in the preview (and the FFXII review before that), they're archaic and ridiculous, and do a great job of discouraging exploration. Indeed, it's almost as if Level-5 recognises this and have accounted for it by including an item that makes random encounters go away for a time. Isn't that more or less an admission that they're irritating? So why keep them at all?

I honestly don't know. Anyway, on the plus side, at least battles aren't as frequent as they could be, and over relatively quickly thanks to the game's real-time combat system. Similar in design and feel to the combat system featured in the (main) Kingdom Hearts games, it's best characterised as a jazzed-up button-masher – enemies appear and you press X and Square a lot to make them dead. Simple and effective. Where it really succeeds though is in its unique command interface. Instead of having to navigate through a menu to tell your party members what to do, they will instead call out "suggestions" during the battle, which you can then tell to them to act on by pressing one of the shoulder buttons. For example, when one of your characters gets critically hurt, they'll often yell out "health potion". This is another one of those nice little touches I was talking about before.



[above] Attack of the giant space cootie.

[above] Slash at the nipples, they're his only weakness!

What Rogue Galaxy lacks in a decent story and characters is more than made up for in overall polish.

But as fun as the combat is initially, it is eventually ground into tedium by Rogue Galaxy's relentless repetitiveness. As I said before, I've been playing the game for forty hours, and I reckon at least thirty-five of those have been spent walking through dungeons and killing the same type of monsters over and over again. In their defence, said dungeons are usually well-designed and pleasant to explore, but it would be really nice if there was something else to do too. Yes, there's item-creation and the factory to play around with (see boxout), but they're ultimately just welcome distractions from the grind of the main game. In short: it needs more variety. Badly.

If you play Rogue Galaxy, there's a good chance you'll like it, but that's all you'll do. It's polished and easy to play, but beleaguered by too many flaws to inspire devotion. To say it again, I've played it for forty hours, so clearly it's doing something right. But to tell you the truth, I doubt I'll make it to fifty. <<

Highly polished; easy to play; pleasant to look at	Half-arsed story; terrible characters; numbing repetition	HYPER VERDICT

A great time waster – but not much more than that.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
94	85	76	80

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Colin McRae: DiRT

DANIEL WILKS: MuD

category: **Racing**
players: **1-multi**
developer: **Codemasters**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **G**
available: **June 29**

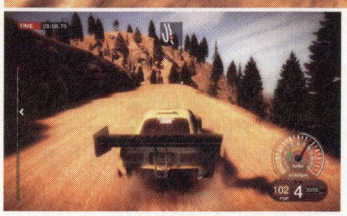
Let me start this off by repeating something that I've said many a time in the past in the pages of this very magazine; I like my arcade style racers like Burnout and Ridge Racer but by and large don't particularly enjoy sims. They're just not my thing – racing to get a license has little appeal. The closest I get to motor-sports for the most part is watching Clarkson, May and Hammond make witty comments about how useless the French are at making cars. On the surface that makes me look like just about the worst possible choice for a person to review the game – I'm not a fan of the genre and I don't have a huge amount of experience with it. Rally games are all a bit foreign to me. If you look a little deeper though, I'm really the best choice to review the game – I'm the newcomer, the person picking up the game for the first time without the weight of franchise knowledge informing my opinions. All this really, though, is just a roundabout way of saying, in the opinion of a relative Colin McRae virgin, DiRT is, without hyperbole, absolutely f**king brilliant, just the type of game to draw new players into the genre.

The fact that the word "rally" has been left out of the title of the game is quite telling; rather than simply a rally game, DiRT aims to be the ultimate off-road racing game, not only offering simple (if driving around a dirt track at breakneck speed can be considered simple) but rally-cross, buggies, truck racing, crossovers – six disciplines over 66 races, with 46 vehicles in 12 different classes to buy and drive. The range of choice and options is a little overwhelming at first but the intuitive menus, options and range of challenges presented quickly draw you in.

GETTING DIRTY

Every race has a range of difficulty options from absolute beginner through to pro but rather than simply increasing the level of opponent driver AI; each difficulty level varies the level of driving simulation in the game. On the easiest setting everything in the car is set to automatic and damage modeling is little more than cosmetic (aside from truly epic crashes that take you out of the race altogether), essentially turning the game into an arcade racer. At higher levels of difficulty races become progressively more technical as the simulation aspects of the game are upped – every bit of damage modeling effects the handling of vehicles in subtle ways, causing the steering to pull to different directions, the engine to labour harder, pushing out fewer HP than it should. The difficulty scales magnificently, presenting a challenge to players over a wide range of skill levels and always encouraging you to step up a rank to earn more prize money and points to open up new events and cars to buy. Of course, in keeping with the sim background of the franchise, at any level of difficulty players are free to tinker with the handling, suspension and the like before the race, setting it to their exact specifications.

Each of the race disciplines offers a different challenge, from straight rally races against the clock through to the chaotic and

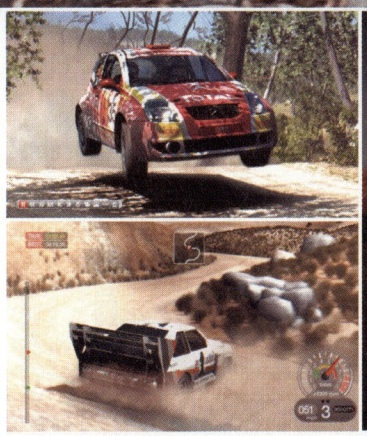


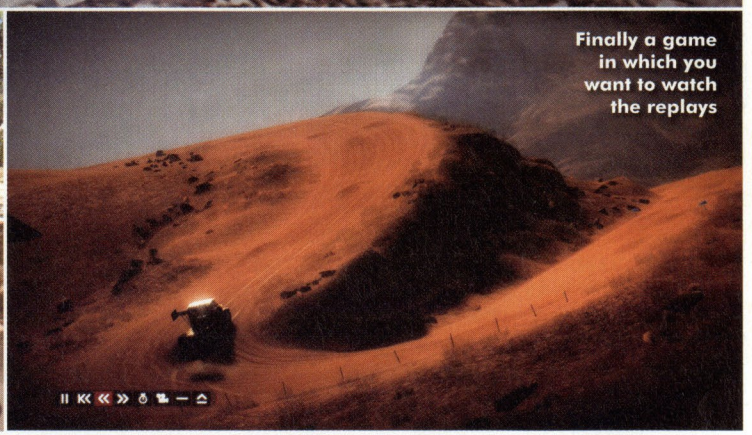
[above] Screens from the remake of Buggy Boy

THE PORK CHOP EXPRESS One of the most strangely enjoyable disciplines in DiRT is the big-rig racing. Although the vehicles move a lot slower than even the slowest rally cars and buggies the races are still kept fun, exciting and challenging through the handling. While in nearly every other discipline you can slide around corners with only a little braking, the big-rigs require a huge amount of subtlety to move – take any corner at too high a speed or too sharply and you'll tip over. Down hill sections are also an immense amount of fun as the trucks pick up a huge amount of momentum making them scarily fast death machines.

Players can also jump into single races in the Challenge mode. Unfortunately we have not been able to test online multiplayer at this time.

brilliant Rally-cross, essentially motocross in cars, buggies or trucks but segueing from tarmac to dirt at different portions of the track, vastly altering the handling of the vehicles. Other events include Rally-crossover, a time trial against an opponent in which both racers start at different positions on the same track and Rally-Raid, a hectic six car race around mountain tracks where balancing where effective cornering is just as important, of not more so than actual speed. The controls feel incredibly tight and responsive, the slightest nudge on the thumbstick giving instant satisfaction. We'd like to be able to tell you how the game feels with a good force-feedback wheel but ours appears to be buggered and won't register on the debug machine.





[above] No jokes, just pretty

BeAUTY

From the first menu screen to the last race, DiRT is a game that absolutely wows you with some of the most beautiful graphics we've yet seen on a next-gen system. An immense amount of thought and detail has gone into every aspect of the presentation of the game and this is obvious from the outset. The menus (it feels a little strange to praise the look of a menu in a review) float in a kind of 3D void, smoothly sliding from one to the next in a very soothing and intuitive way. The race menu, presented in a pyramid fashion allows you to see what is coming so you can plan which vehicles to purchase to unlock new events. The load screens take you through the stats of your combined races, telling you your average race position, highest speed, furthers distance jumped, longest time on two wheels and the like – sure, nothing too revolutionary there but it's nice to have something to keep your attention.

» Crash into a metal barricade and it will deform, giving the vehicles a fantastic sense of weight

Once the actual races start the graphics leap from the screen. Cars are immaculately detailed, as are the tracks, effectively mimicking the real life locations. Naturalistic lighting effects add to the air of realism with an beautiful over-bright effect when you transition from shade to light and some great glare if you choose to drive from the cockpit camera (unfortunately you can't put you hand in front of your face, Pike's Peak style when playing with a gamepad – even someone who doesn't know much about rally driving has seen the amazing Pike's Peak footage). DiRT has an incredible sense of speed thanks to, in part, some impressive motion blurring effects. Not only are the cars intricately damage modeled, barricades are as well, once again adding to the sense of realism. Crash into a metal barricade and it will deform, giving the vehicles a fantastic sense of weight. Amazingly none of the graphical tricks cause any kind of impact on the framerate, which remains rock solid throughout every event without even a hint of slowdown. Again adding to the sense of realism, the developers have sampled the engine noises of real vehicles to create a hectic and multi-layered soundscape.

Although some rally purists may be a little put off that their key franchise has branched off from straight rally racing, shunning this addition to the franchise would be a crime. Colin McRae: DiRT is a truly exceptional racing game with something to offer nearly everyone, from devotees of arcade racing to the most dedicated of simulation fans. It is, as I said right in the beginning, absolutely brilliant, almost enough so to justify the higher price point of next-gen games. <<

Looks incredible; licensed cars; variety of racing styles and vehicles	Our wheel is buggered	HYPER VERDICT
Good enough to make a convert out of you	VISUALS 97 / SOUND 92 / GAMEPLAY 95	95

X360 / **PS3** / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

!! A true sequel to Ninja Gaiden has been rumoured for years now, but at present shows no sign of surfacing any time soon. There is, however, an all-new Ryu Hayabusa game coming to the Nintendo DS, called Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword, which will see you using the touch screen to control Ryu's ninja activities. More on this as it surfaces!

Ninja Gaiden Sigma

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE is a mammal, and kills people ALL the time.

category: **Action**
players: **1**
developer: **Team Ninja**
publisher: **Tecmo**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **TBC**
available: **July**

We like Ninjas. If you like Ninjas too, then the odds are that you've played Ninja Gaiden already. Not only did it do pretty well for itself when it was first released in mid-2004, but it was popular enough to get remade and re-released as Ninja Gaiden Black one year later, in 2005.

A mere two years on and we are seeing yet another remake, in the form of Ninja Gaiden Sigma on PlayStation 3, but is the third time a charm, or is three a crowd?

FLIP OUT AND KILL PEOPLE

When the original Ninja Gaiden arrived on ye olde Xbox, we were gobsmacked. The game looked fantastic, easily besting every other action game on the system. It also played extremely well, with a complex yet approachable combat system, some truly imposing boss battles and more challenge than your average gamer would ever need. We liked it so much that it earned Hyper's Big Rubber Stamp of Approval™ and made game of the month for June, 2004.

For Ninja Gaiden Sigma on the PlayStation 3, it's the same story – but by that I don't mean that it will be getting a Big Rubber Stamp of Approval™, I mean that literally, Ninja Gaiden Sigma is the exact same story as the original Xbox version.

In four years, most developers might at least try to release an entirely new game in one of their leading franchises (after all, that is what a franchise is for), instead we get an almost identical game three times in a row. Now, we're not saying that Sigma is bad. The game is just as fun, the difficulty just as challenging and the combat just as versatile as it has always been, but when you've played the same game four years running, things get old.

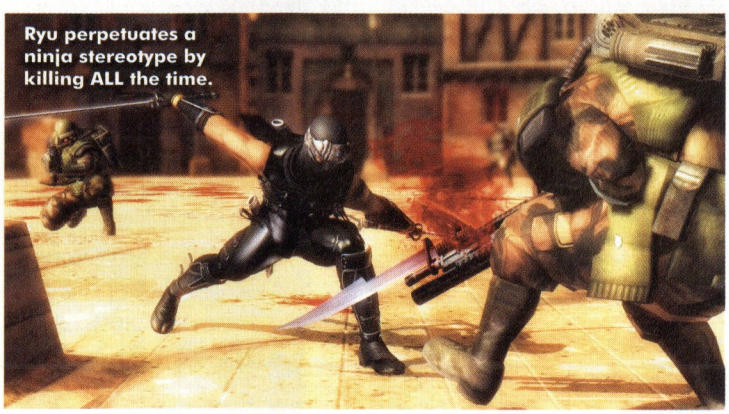
There are of course a few differences, although what has changed is difficult to spot, and overall adds little to the game. The graphics of course look different, although only slightly. Sigma still looks reminiscent of the original Xbox version, but it's now in high-resolution, the character models are far more detailed and the special effects far more extravagant.

Get far enough and you'll unlock the game's most interesting new feature, four previously unseen levels staring the game's axe-wielding, impossibly large-breasted heroine, Rachel. This is definitely something for fans of the series to look forward to, as she's become somewhat of a favourite since her revealing entrance in the original game. Nevertheless, this is the only real "new" gameplay content you can expect to see in Ninja Gaiden Sigma.

Seemingly as a token gesture, Team Ninja have also added a SIXAXIS function whereby you can shake your controller to increase the strength of your magic, or "Ninpo", powers. Much like most other examples of SIXAXIS control, it adds basically nothing to the game.

If you've never played any of its previous iterations then don't let us discourage you from picking up a copy of Ninja Gaiden Sigma. It's still the same brilliantly designed, beautiful to look at and thoroughly challenging game that it has always been, and as such, newcomers should probably add ten or so percent to our final score.

However, if you have played Ninja Gaiden before, and there's a good chance that you have, just know this before you lay out yet another hundred (or should that be a hundred-and-ten?) bucks – apart from a few very small changes – it's the same game we've been playing for years. <<



Ryu perpetuates a ninja stereotype by killing ALL the time.

Hi-res ninja antics, some hands-on time with Rachel.

Same old, same old.

We played this four years ago. Where's Ninja Gaiden 2?

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
91	78	90	**79**

!!! There is also some vehicular combat contained in Monster Madness, with a number of rides available, including boats, ATVs and flying machines. Much like the rest of the game though, these sequences aren't perfect, but it brings some much-needed variety to the repetitive levels

X360 / PS3 / WII / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE wants BRRRAAAAIIIIIINNNNNNSSSSSS...

category: **Action**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Artificial Studios**
publisher: **Southpeak**
price: **X360 $99.95, PS3 $119.95, PC $69.95**
rating: **G** / available: **May**

If you're an older gamer, or you're the owner of a top-of-the-line wayback machine, you may know about a little game called Zombies Ate My Neighbors. Developed by Lucasarts and released on the SNES and Megadrive in 1993, Zombies combined the top-down shooting, hacking, slashing gameplay of Gauntlet with all the Draculas, Frankenstein's, Mummies and wolf-men (not to mention zombies) of a Fangoria convention.

Stepping out of the wayback machine and into 2007 and we have a surprisingly similar premise in Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia, but is it a thriller, or just shocking?

ZOMBIES ATE MY GAMEPLAY

The game gets off to a good start with a humorous comic-book style cutscene that introduces the game's four dysfunctional characters and sets up the premise. Four mismatched friends, a geek, a goth-girl, a skateboarding goofball and a super-hot cheerleader are hanging out at their suburban home when they are set upon by a few thousand unwelcome houseguests – zombies!

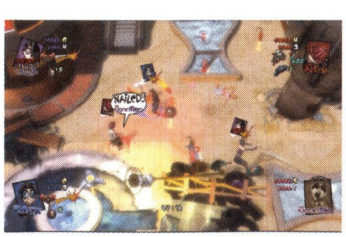
Using a variety of impromptu weapons, including toilet plungers, samurai swords, nail-guns, shotguns, grenades, rocket launchers, lightning guns and other weird and wild gadgets, you'll have to defend suburbia from the evils of the recently resurrected deceased.

Zombie killing is always a solid premise for a game, but be that as it may, it doesn't save Monster Madness from being a thoroughly disappointing experience.

At first the mindless zombie slaughter is good fun – countless undead fill the landscape, and by mashing your trigger buttons you can unleash a barrage of attacks ranging from weak slaps to powerful charge-up special attacks.

However, both the visuals and the level design are dull, and around about the time your trigger finger goes numb and you start to feel the ache of repetitive strain injury kick in, you begin to realise that there is little else this game has to offer, other than button mashing.

The camera control too is predicably poor, with the viewpoint swinging wildly in the overhead view, while the close-up viewpoint doesn't allow you to see enough of the playing field (and the monsters coming from behind) to make it useful.



[below] If I "NAILED!!" Jennifer, I'd brag too.

[above] Little known fact: zombies like to cuddle.

Apparently Monster Mansion was also built with advanced physics in mind, but what it actually has on offer is fairly unimpressive. Yes, you can build a mountain of garbage and use it as a barricade, and yes, things do fly about wildly when you explode them, but the physics are rarely anything more than a cosmetic addition, and the game's grinding gameplay will keep you so occupied that you'll not have time to appreciate them anyway.

Typically, multiplayer is the one feature that can save a game from it own lacklustre single player experience, but in Monster Madness's case it actually multiplies the pre-existing problems by four. Admirably, Monster Madness does attempt offer jump-in, jump-out online and offline co-operative for four players, but the camera and control problems that are irritating in single-player become intolerable once three more characters are on the screen, something that caused everyone we played the game with to jump out almost as soon as they'd jumped in.

The flaws in the game's design and execution could have perhaps been less detrimental if it were a dirt cheap Xbox Live Arcade or PS3 network download, but instead what we have is a game that looks and plays like a budget title launching at full price (and we're talking 120 clams here!).

Even if it were cheaper though, Monster Madness's shallow and repetitive gameplay would still leave you with an aching trigger finger and heavy eyelids long before you've saved suburbia. <<

Predictably enough a Wii Pokemon game is also in the works, titled Pokemon Battle Revolution, which will let you battle you Pokemon from Diamond and Pearl on the big screen.

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / **DS** / PSP

Pokémon Diamond & Pearl

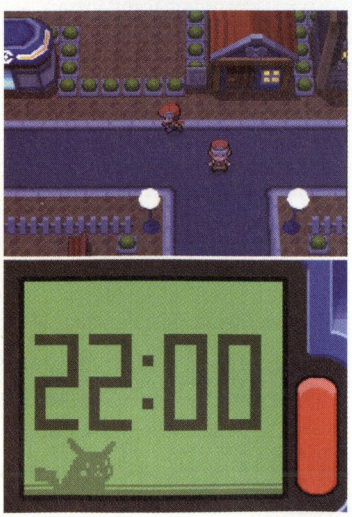
ELEANOR EIFFE doesn't gotta catch 'em all. She can quit any time she likes... honest

category: **RPG**
players: **1-8**
developer: **Game Freak**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **21 June**

I declared myself officially sick of the Pokémon franchise some time during my second hour of fishing for Feebas the Emerald version. Still, after the surprisingly playable Pokémon Ranger came out towards the end of last year, I've been rather more optimistic about Pokémon: Diamond and Pearl. After all, the switch to a new platform would be a great opportunity to reinvigorate the tired old Pokémon formula, right?

So what great improvements has the DS' superior hardware lent to the Pokémon games? Polygonal windmills, colour changing soil and the ability to adorn your pokémon with little bits of fluff. Truly, this is a giant leap forward! While it may have been unrealistic to expect a major change of direction for the series, it's still hard not to be disappointed at just how familiar Diamond and Pearl feel. The core game mechanics are no different to what we saw in Ruby and Sapphire, aside from a real-time day-night cycle (which is a throwback to the Gold, Silver and Crystal days). There are 107 new Pokémon to catch but one can't help but feel that the designers are rehashing old ideas. (I defy anyone to prove to me that Starly and Pidgey aren't the same goddamn pokémon.) Diamond and Pearl don't even look particularly fresh. Sure, there are a few spiffy graphical effects, but the art style hasn't changed since the last generation. Continuity is all well and good, but in this case, it makes everything feel a little stale.

[bottom] Oh noes! It's twenty-two o'clock!



MY POKEMANS

Okay, perhaps I'm being a bit unfair. There are a few new features in Pokémon: Diamond and Pearl that are more than superficial. Outside of battle, the bottom screen is occupied by a device called the Pokétch (a clumsy portmanteau of "Pokémon Watch"). The Pokétch has a number of functions ("apps"), some of which are more useful than others. The digital watch is kind of handy if you're trying to keep an eye on the time and the berry detector is neat, but most of the other apps are pretty useless. And surely it would have been a better strategy to display the Pokétch on the top screen? The stylus would be better put to use exploring the game world that occasionally tapping a big red button. Fortunately, there is one aspect of the game that didn't disappoint in this regard. Exploring the Underground of the Sinnoh region is a pretty neat side quest that uses the dual screen system to full effect. There's a fairly enjoyable mining mini-game down there as well as the opportunity for some Wi-fi multiplayer hijinks.

[above] I say you should bring in your Magikarp

I'm sure a lot of people will like Pokémon: Diamond and Pearl. These games are the most refined examples of a highly successful formula. Still, it's hard to escape the feeling that a great opportunity for innovation was wasted. Some of us are tired of playing the same old game. <<

The prettiest Pokémon yet	Not significantly different from the GBA games	HYPER VERDICT
Yep, it's Pokémon alright.	VISUALS 82 / SOUND 67 / GAMEPLAY 74	74

!!! The soundtrack to Chocobo Tales features remixed versions of a number of classic FF tunes, including the Boss Theme from FFVI and the Mako Plant music from FFVII. (And obviously lots of chocobo themes as well.)

X360 / PS3 / WII / PC / PS2 / **DS** / PSP

Final Fantasy Fables: **Chocobo Tales**

DAN STAINES has a thing for the birds

category: **RPG**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Square-Enix**
publisher: **Square-Enix**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Did you know that this is the tenth game Square-Enix has made based on chocobos? I found that out on Wikipedia just now. Ten games! And all of them are as horrifying as a kitten cooked in a microwave. All of them except Chocobo Tales. In a turn for the incredible, Square-Enix has not only made a great kids game – they made a great kids game with chocobos. That's like Martin Scorsese making a summer camp movie with Carrot-Top and winning an Academy Award. It's just not something you expect to happen. But then here we are.

KWEH! KWEH!

What we have here is a collection of DS-style mini-games coated in a thin RPG shell. As the heroic yellow chocobo, your goal is to rescue your chocobo friends from the magic books in which they've been imprisoned. Each book is a mini-game based on a Final Fantasy-themed remix of a popular children's tale. So instead of The Hare and the Tortoise, for example, you get The Cactuar and the Adamantoise – with the goal of the mini-game being to guide the Adamantoise to victory in a race against the (surprisingly psychotic) Cactuar. Depending on the challenge, winning a mini-game can release a chocobo, remove an obstacle, or net you a prize in the form of battle cards.

Because this is a game meant for kids, conflict in Chocobo Tales obviously can't be resolved with violence. Hence the card game. Essentially Magic: The Gathering-lite, it involves using a deck of cards based around famous Final Fantasy monsters to deplete your opponent's life before he can do the same to you. Going into the mechanics of it would take up too much space, but what I will say is that it's probably the most intuitive card-based battle system I've ever encountered.

[below] Even Chocobos are sometimes held back a grade

Admittedly there isn't much strategy involved – it's mostly about having good cards and a bit of luck – but it's still an addictive and enjoyable little game. It's just a shame that getting powerful cards is so painfully difficult.

MMM, CAKEWALK...

Yes, yes – I know. This is a kids game. Kids games aren't supposed to be difficult. This one is. Mini-games that start out as cakewalks quickly develop into torturous ordeals as soon as you try to unlock all the rewards each book contains. Some of these challenges are just insane, so much so that I doubt I'll ever beat them all no matter how hard I try. And I don't think I'm that bad at videogames. I beat Ninja Gaiden. I beat God of War on God Mode. But these mini-games ... it's like they were made for cyborgs or something. They're beyond the capabilities of ordinary human beings.

Of course, you're not strictly required to get all the rare cards and other secrets, so in that sense Chocobo Tales is about as hard as you want it to be. That's a good thing, because when you're not screaming profanity at it, this is a really entertaining game. It's not compelling, but it is endearing, and I suspect it would be a good choice for parents who'd like a game to play with their kids – and for anyone else who likes good-natured fun. <<

[above] Some pink haired bird - heh, geddit?

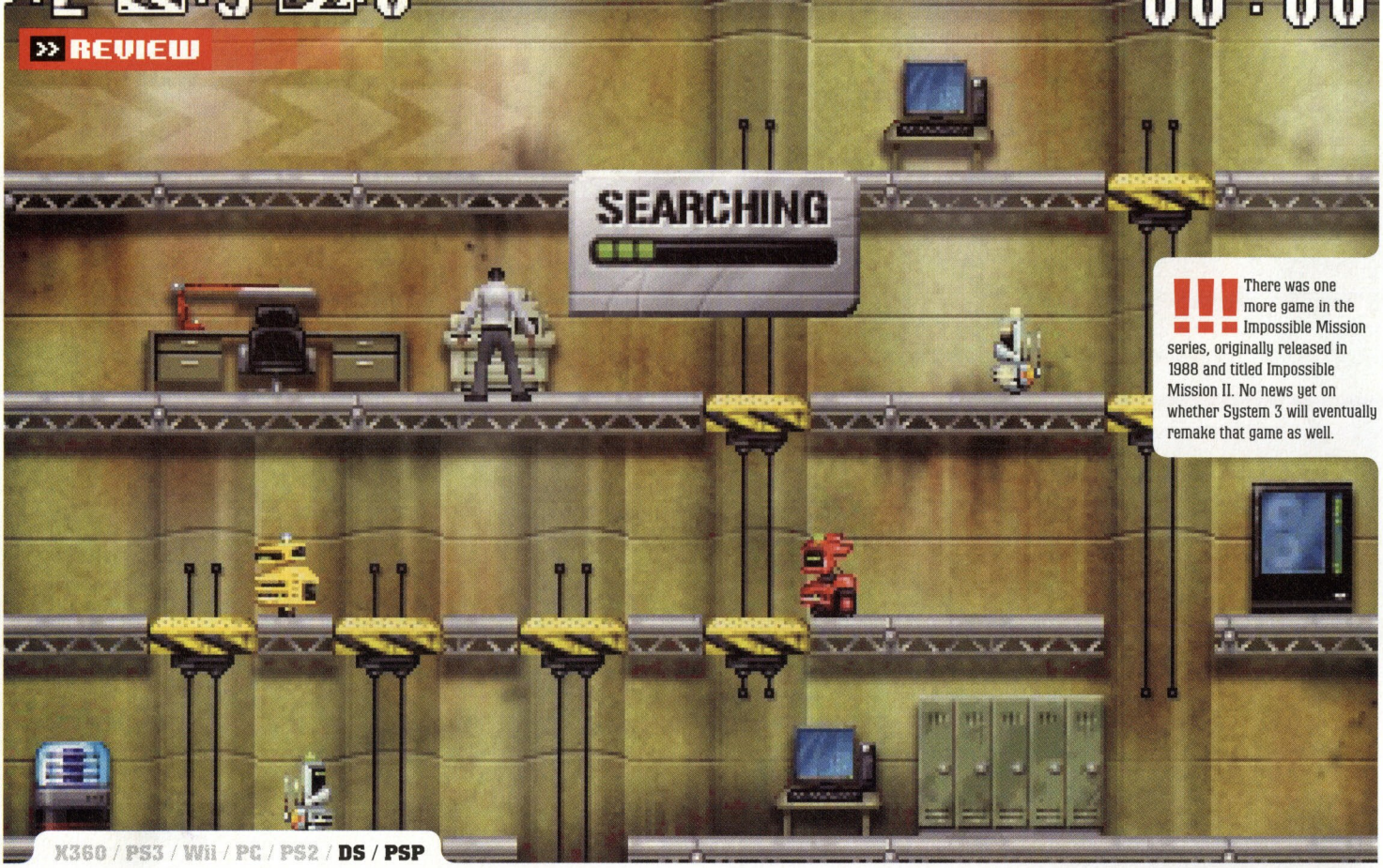
Endearing and accessible; wide selection of mini-games; card game

Some of the mini-games get insanely hard; music is mostly repetitive

HYPER VERDICT

Cute, good-natured and lots of fun – just like a chocobo!

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	70	86	**84**



!!! There was one more game in the Impossible Mission series, originally released in 1988 and titled Impossible Mission II. No news yet on whether System 3 will eventually remake that game as well.

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / **DS / PSP**

Impossible Mission

For **DAN STAINES**, the impossible is just really, really hard

category: **Platform/Puzzle**
players: **1**
developer: **System 3**
publisher: **Play It**
price: **$49.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **May**

A direct port of an ancient Commodore 64 game, Impossible Mission is a unique platform/puzzle hybrid in which the player is given 8 hours of real-time to infiltrate a madman's secret lair and stop him from launching a nuclear missile.

So let's be clear about this: this game is not a remake. It's a port. New graphics and sound aside, this is more or less the same Impossible Mission that was released for the Commodore 64 in 1984. For the two or three of you familiar with the original, that's pretty much the end of the review. It's Impossible Mission. You've played it before. Do you want to play it again? Then here you go. You don't even have the play the updated version – the classic game is included right there on the same gamecard. All good? Okay then.

DESTROY HIM, MY ROBOTS!

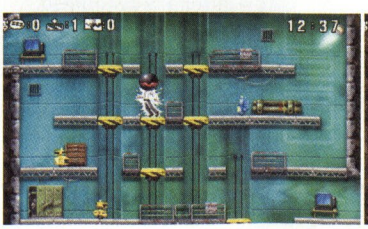
Now, for you guys who haven't played the original, things are a little more complicated. The first thing you need to understand about Impossible Mission is that it's unashamedly old-school. With the exception of a save feature (which wasn't present in the old version), the comforting conventions of modern game design – conventions that you have undoubtedly come to take for granted – are almost entirely absent here. There is no gently sloping difficulty curve, no in depth character development or back-story, and no helpful companion to pop up and tell you what to do whenever you get stuck. This is spartan gaming at its most severe.

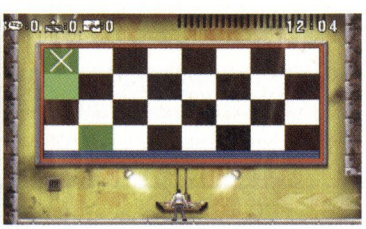
You'll die. And die. And die, and die, and die. You won't know what to do, and eventually you'll end up thinking the game actually is impossible, because goddamn if you can figure out how to beat it. This is your baptism of fire, and unfortunately, it cannot be avoided. But if you manage to endure this, you will find that all of sudden, everything starts to click. You will begin to develop an intuitive grasp of the Prince of Persia-style platform mechanics. You'll remember the patrol-patterns of each of the deadly robots, how to search for puzzle pieces without being killed, and how to fit those puzzles pieces together to unlock the password to the bad guy's inner-sanctum. This is when you'll start to enjoy yourself. You'll realise that Impossible Mission isn't a bad game. It's just obtuse and demanding. That's how games were made back in the old days. It's part of their charm.

Of course, being an old game doesn't make Impossible Mission immune from criticism. There are definitely some aspects of it that ought to have been improved for this iteration. Take the eight-hour time limit. Although it adds a tangible air of desperation and suspense, it also means it's entirely possible to spend hours playing the game only to realise right near the end that you don't have enough time to finish it. It's neat that System 3 has been so faithful to the original, but come on – this was never a perfect game. It CAN be improved.

Although I can't recommend it wholesale, I do think that you ought to at least try Impossible Mission. Yes, it's an incredibly difficult and deliberately esoteric game, but it's also utterly unique and a lot of fun once you become accustomed to its quirks. Plus, it's only fifty bucks. That's a bargain whichever way you look at it. <<

[above] Witness the horror of killer vacuum cleaners...





[below] Prawn to King Horsey 7... Checkmate!

Challenging, unique gameplay, fastidiously faithful to the original

Difficult and esoteric, fails to improve on the original's shortcomings

HYPER VERDICT

Well worth a look for fans of retro games, and a challenge.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
74	65	80	**76**

!!! Telltale posted an add for a 'Wii Programmer' on their website a while ago now. Perhaps with the PC release now out of the way we will begin to hear a bit more about what they had in mind.

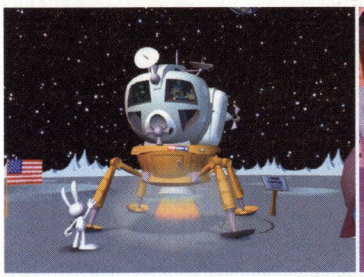
X360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / DS / PSP

Sam and Max: Season 1 – Bright Side of the Moon

Hi! I'm **TIM HENDERSON!** *ting*

category: **Platformer**
players: **1**
developer: **Charlie Dog**
publisher: **Charlie Dog**
price: **US $14.99** / rating: **N/A**
available: **TBA**

It's over. There's no more coming after this – potential for a second season ignored for just a moment, Sam & Max's adventures have ended once again. The episode structure of the release has given a strange taste to the sentiment of finishing the game as we've finished it five times already, but always comfortable in the knowledge that there would be more just around the corner. This time we have to accept that it's over for real. The last chapter of the Dog 'n Rabbit duo had been completed, but amid all this melancholy there's good news to report.



OKAAAY!!! :)

The final chapter of Sam & Max: Season 1 is excellent. It does a pleasing job of bringing the previous chapters all together in a way that shows that Telltale have been listening to the feedback they've received, it feels a little more weighty in substance, and the puzzle balance is near perfect.

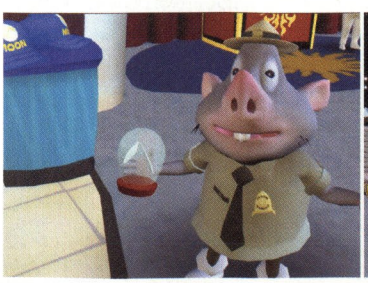
No mistake, Bright Side of the Moon is still on the easy side and is perhaps no more difficult than the previous episodes, but the puzzles do make you feel more accomplished nonetheless. You have to pay attention to everything now, searching your world with renewed zeal, as previous items that grabbed your interest but proved to be little more than decoration while clicking through the first episode may suddenly find a purpose. Solutions at times can also involve an extra step for proper completion, which helps make this chapter feel more rounded.

Environments feel newer as well. Your standard neighbourhood basks under the light of a differently coloured sky for the first time in the series, which does go some way towards making the old and familiar seem fresh enough to last you another handful of hours. The new locations, also, display a little extra effort. There's a bit more space to explore, and the level of detail in the design is spot on. Sam & Max remains a fine looking game through sheer dint of a characteristic style and very competent execution, rather than technical marvels.

Bright Side even lasts a little longer. Not much longer, but long enough to make it truly feel like a final. There are a lot of characters to revisit (all of whom spout sharp dialogue), a lot of references to pick up on, and even quite a lot to do: the plot and puzzle structures are circular, which while a little predictable does allow an amount of freedom of approach, and there's quite an impressive amount of choice for a game that is but a fraction of the whole.

Judging a release like this on its own merits is a tricky proposition, as experiences with previous episodes feel so necessary to the overall picture. That said, Dark Side of the Moon is a very fitting end to a series of games that mostly lived up to their potential. It may be the best of the batch, even; a no-brainer for those following each episode, and perhaps the final justification for those holding off to see the completed pie with all pieces intact. <<

ZOMG! I cn toattly sea up yor nose!



A genuine sense of completion

After a half-year chapters, it's hard to believe it's actually over

HYPER VERDICT

A fitting conclusion that is debatably the best chapter of the lot.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
84	85	87	**87**

Cooking Mama: Cook Off

category: **Cooking Simulator**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Office Create**
publisher: **505 Gamestreet**
price: **$99.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

If you played the DS version of Cooking Mama, you'd know how much fun the simple concept of a game based around cooking can be, and with the release of Cooking Mama: Cook Off, you can now have that same experience on your Wii.

The major new feature for the Wii version is of course the wiimote functionality, and using the wiimote as a stirrer, knife, pot-handle and many more kitchen implements, Cooking Mama: Cook Off allows for plenty of both fun and frustration.

Some of the mini-games, like stirring, slicing and chopping, work instinctively with your wiimote actions perfectly mimicking the required kitchen task, however, some tasks, like operating a stove, will require multiple tries to perfect. Also, some of the mini-games are particularly sensitive. Cracking an egg for example will leave plenty of yolks on the floor before you master it.

Cooking Mama: Cook Off also comes with multiplayer and single-player split-screen versus modes, one against a CPU-controlled opponent and the other against a friend, allowing you to really see whose cuisine reigns supreme.

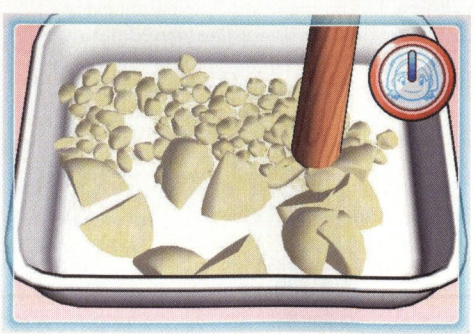
What Cooking Mama: Cook Off lacks though is exactly what was absent from the DS version – a story mode. While cooking to beat your best score may be fun, we can only imagine how good this game could be if you had a consistent character that gained new skills and techniques as you went through your career, training for an ultimate showdown in an Iron Chef-style kitchen stadium.

Cooking Mama: Cook Off is still a feast of bite-sized mini-game fun, but the lack of a story mode and the occasionally oversensitive controls leave it a just a tad underdone for our tastes.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
71	60	72	72



Eledees

category: **Puzzle/FPS/Thing**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Konami**
publisher: **Konami**
price: **$99.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Kind of like a bizarre hybrid of FPS and spring cleaning, Eledees (known as Elebits almost everywhere else in the world – god knows why they changed the name here) casts the player as a ten year old boy with a hatred of the titular creature who charges himself with tracking down and capturing the little blighters after a freak lightning storm knocks out all electricity. Or something like that – the plot is a little tenuous and fairly easy to ignore, especially considering that it's delivered in that lazy painted image with voice-over style that seems to be all-pervasive at the moment. Plot aside, Eledees is a game about moving objects and zapping little creatures with a capture gun, using them to power electrical good to spawn more, capturing them to increase the threshold of weight you can move, moving heavier objects, capturing more eledees, using them to power electrical goods to spawn more, capturing them...you get the picture. Like the plot, the gameplay is a bit tenuous – at first the collection/puzzle gameplay is absorbing and rather charming and the idea of being able to pick up progressively heavier objects is appealing but after a few levels when you realize that there is nothing else to the game the appeal starts to outlive its welcome, especially when gameplay obstacles such as having to complete a levels silently or without breaking anything or making a mess get in the way of the most enjoyable part of the game – throwing stuff around. Thankfully a pretty cool level editor allows you to edit levels you have already completed and turn them into havens for physics aided mayhem.

DIRK WATCH

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
68	80	73	71

Metal Slug Anthology

category: **Platform/Shooter**
players: **1-2**
developer: **SNK Playmore**
publisher: **Ignition Entertainment**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **G**
available: **May**

Believe it or not, it's been ten years since the Metal Slug series first blast into the arcades and into the hearts of shmup-loving gamers the world over. In celebration of this milestone birthday, SNK Playmore are giving you the presents – a compilation of every Metal Slug arcade release on one disk.

All seven games in the illustrious platform/shooting series are here, and apart from the occasional loading screen, they run remarkably close to their arcade counterparts and manages to include all the intense shooting action and gorgeous 2D pixel art and animations that the series is famous for.

The inclusion of Metal Slug 6 is the real coup for this anthology, since it only came out in arcades last year. The sixth instalment not only looks better than all the others, with the traditional lo-res sprites set against some hi-res painted backgrounds, but it also has a few new features that set it apart, including new weapons, vehicles, enemies and a new system where you can store up to two different kinds of weapon for later use. There are even two new playable characters, Ralf and Clark of Ikari Warriors/King of Fighters fame, something that will be sure to have any SNK fan peaking.

The bonus content is a bit lightweight with only a few sound files, art gallery and a text interview with the game's developers – and unfortunately the Combat School mode that was available in the original console versions of Metal Slug 1 & 2 aren't included, but for what it is, Metal Slug Anthology excels. A must for shmup fans.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
84	77	87	86

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Overlord

category: **Puzzle/Action**
players: **1**
developer: **Codemasters**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$109.95**
rating: **MA 15+**
available: **June 29**

Did you ever find yourself playing Pikmin and wondering what it would be like to have them act just a little more evil? We did, but that's not strange for the Hyper HQ. We wonder if everything could be a little more evil. Alas, we may never know the answer to all of our evil questions but we can definitively tell you what would happen if you made Pikmin more evil. They would become Minions. As the central gameplay hook of Overlord, Minions, nasty little gremlins who come in four flavours, normal, fire, poison and water. Although the overlord has access to magical and weapon attacks, minions form the focus of nearly every puzzle and fight. Minions can be controlled with either the right thumbstick or by targeting the enemy or object to be interacted with and sending them out with a few button presses. It's a simple control scheme but works well – for the most part. "Driving" minions with the right thumbstick is a great idea but when it comes at the cost of camera control making it all too easy to drown the little buggers or otherwise get them killed it gets more than a little annoying.

Each of the four types of minion have a different ability – for example, poison (green) minions are immune to poison and can kill poison plants while fire (red) minions have a fire ranged attack, are immune to fire and can absorb flames. The bulk of the game revolves around knowing when to use what type of minion to solve a puzzle. For all the humour in he game (watching minions arm themselves and slowly get tougher is a hoot), Overlord doesn't quite come together as a game – the puzzles aren't quite tough enough to make it a puzzle game and the combat is too hands off to make it a true action game.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
82	86	78	76

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

category: **Action**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Eurocom**
publisher: **Disney Interactive**
price: **X360 - $99.95 PC/PS2/PSP/DS - $69.95**
rating: **PG**
available: **June**

Pirate fans, we've got some good news and some bad news for you.

The good news is that Pirate of the Caribbean: At World's End looks fantastic. Combining both Dead Man's Chest and the new At World's End, Pirates 3 sees you controlling Jack, Will and Elizabeth in an adventure against both new and old enemies. The three leads are near-perfect virtual replicas of Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightly.

The environments also look great, each area is deeply detailed and the water and rain effects in particular are lovely.

So what is the bad news you ask? The combat is jaw-droppingly brainless. Every sword battle ends the same way – you slash your sword twice, your enemy promptly gets tuckered out and turns their back to you, and then you stab them – every single time. The game does offer a charge-up "special" move, but the standard slash, slash, stab-in-the-back combo is so effective that you'll never need to use anything else.

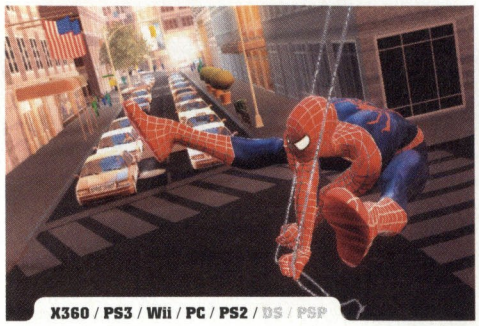
The insipid level design is filled to bursting with the aforementioned combat. Then there is the misguided "duelling" mini-game that requires you to fight not with your usual slash, slash, backstab move, but with a quick-timer event system that rarely registers your button presses, and is never fun. Oh, and the camera is rubbish too, but with the rest of this game's problems that will be the last of you worries.

Exactly how Pirates 3 came to have such pretty visuals and such ugly gameplay is a mystery to us, but for now the only consolation that we can take away from the game is that since it's the final in a trilogy, we probably won't have to play Pirates 4. Fingers crossed...

RAYMOND P. SHOTWELL

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
90	88	40	40



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Spiderman 3

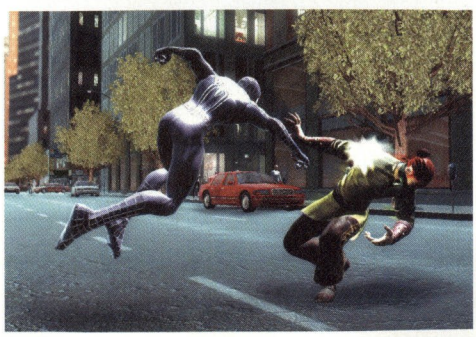
category: **Action**
players: **1**
developer: **Treyarch**
publisher: **Activision**
price: **$109.95**
rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Treyarch! What happened? With Spider-Man: The Movie 2 you delivered us one of the most fun and exhilarating movement options we'd seen in a game in ages. Your web swinging was nearly perfect, balancing speed, fun and a touch of realistic physics interaction that had people spending more time simply honing around the Big Apple than playing the storyline of the movie. Where did this brilliance go? Why did you replace it with a crappy and uncontrollable, supposedly realistic web-swinging action that more often than not seems to use your momentum against you and send you hurtling in a direction you don't want to go? And what's with the camera in combat that keeps flying around so rapidly that it makes a Uwe Boll film look competently edited? And how come everyone looks like a zombie? I know Marvel has their Marvel Zombies trade out at the moment but I don't think there's a deliberate crossover going on. Don't get me started on those execrably bad "quick-time" events that expect you to have reflexes as fast as the fictional wall crawler to pull off the button presses in time so as not to have to reload the cutscene and start again. Finally, why is it that the game boasts some of the worst "next-gen" graphic we've yet seen? Please, for the love of all that is holy, in the next Spider-Man game (and we all know there is inevitably going to be another one), can you go back to the drawing board and make a game that's fun and playable rather than one that is available and out in time for the movie?

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
65	80	61	58



The Little Guy

Bugger the blockbuster - Christian Read champions the little guy

Everyone knows about the big releases that are coming up. Conan, Warhammer Online, Lord of the Rings, the new Guild Wars. These are the words that keep getting thrown up on all the websites. These are the big stars, these are the show.

But what about the little guy? Who is gonna stick up for him? Up the workers, I say.

Recently, I've been trolling the sites, checking out the smaller MMO producers and, well, there are hells of a lot more of them than I figured. Trickster Online, Nine Dragons, Tales of the Pirates, Darkworld and many more besides. And every single one of them is up against Warcraft.

I was chatting a bunch of Warcraft players the other day. Damn, man. Based on my highly scientific and yet strangely totally anecdotal evidence, I've discovered that there's whole sections of MMO Warcraft players who don't play other games at all. I don't mean, are casual gamers. I don't mean only play Warcraft to the exception of all other MMOs. I mean, don't play any other games on any platforms. And the thing is, there's way more out there than just Elves and Midgets and dragons and all that stuff.

That's bad. And it's bad because Warcraft, a great game, sure but it's the pop music of MMOs. Its everywhere, it's sort of bland and there's nothing too challenging in design philosophy, world-building or what have you.

Here's the thing, though. It's them big old fantasy games that have the market cornered. Not surprising, really. Everyone knows Lord of the Rings, now, which could charitably called a big inspiration on Warcraft. Fantasy novels are one of the biggest selling genres of books in the world. But god knows, I don't think I can ever look at a badly accented pseudo-Scots midget with an axe ever again.

Tolkien-stealing fantasy is a problem. It's all too familiar, all too done. It chokes the life out of everything and leaves you very bored after a while. D&D Online barely dented the market and it did it because it just felt way too by the numbers. And when all those players, who equate the entire gaming experience with WoW, go, be it in two years or ten, we'll lose whole demographics of people who should be gaming with us.

Where are the other genres? There are some SF elements, sure. EVE Online has its moments but it all feels a little bit too familiar to me. Star Wars Galaxies is famously awful. Besides, those games just feel by-the-numbers to me. Routine kinds of worlds to play in, ordinary kinds of quests.

I want to see horror games, historical games, trading games, weird cyberpunk, comedy games, sports games, erotica, politics and more beside. Even if a games company is creating a fantasy or SF game, they should be really fresh takes on the whole thing. I want a Planescape MMO. I want Bas-Lag and Arakis. I want Deus Ex and Halo levels of quality and originality.

I want MMOs where I'm controlling nations, empires. I want to be slaves struggling against brutal oppressors. I want to be in a band, I want to be a career criminal, a man adrift in an alien world of shocking weirdness. I don't want to be a guy in platemail.

As Tim Curry once nearly said: There must never be another Orc.

Thankfully, there's a whole slew of stuff that seems to be looking to create a fresh experience for the online role-player. Games that not only bring new types of gameplay but new types of worlds to play in, characters to become. I damn well hope.

Let's take a gander, shall we?

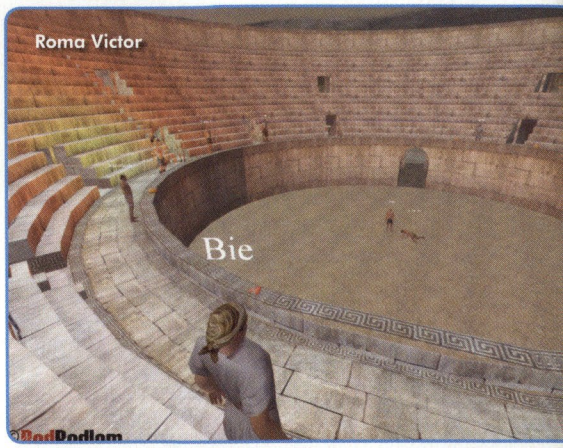
Soul of the Ultimate Nation

Hello Kitty Online Adventures

In the world of Japanese characters, there are very few with the power, the sheer juggernauticalistic staying power and iron-fisted longevity of one Hello, Kitty. Yes, she's back and this time, you get to play your very own Sanrio character. This one is fairly aimed at the 12 year old girl and metrosexual market. It's all about character design, having your own house and doing all sorts of cutesy puzzles and kawaii-themed... I don't know... adventures of some sort. While this staunchly beer drinking, cigarette smoking bastard of a hardened computer gaming journalist might not seem to find it too enticing, well, this looks like it will be the most addictive game your little sister or daughter or even, god help you, girlfriend ever ignored you to play.

ExAnimus

In the future, zombies have taken control of the world and humans live in isolated pockets of survivors. Around them, the undead hunger, looking forever to feast upon flesh! Frightened? Oh ho, silly, you don't have to be because it's only a game! Well, it might be as there's very little information coming out from the game's publishers. Still, playing either zombie or human in a more mature horror/survival MMO has us well interested, so it has. Here's hoping this one gets up on time because, well... motherlovin' zombies! Admit it; you want to farm for brains.



All Points Bulletin

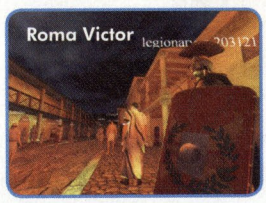
Here we go, a bit of the good old fashioned cops versus robbers. APB puts you either as a gang banger or a copper. The people behind the first GTA are back at work, which means we'll see free flowing gameplay and lots of cool low-intensity urban pacification, i.e. dirty gun and knife fighting and more short order prostitutes than you could poke a stick at. Moving away from the typical level-grinding, expect to see a lot of customisation at work as well as attitude dripping from its West Coast pores. There's frustratingly little information on how this one will play but it is looking fine indeed.

Soul of the Ultimate Nation

This one seeks to weld the looks and gameplay of an action game with the complex storylines of an MMO. Sure does look purty, that's for certain. And as an added bonus, there's a score from the dude who wrote the music for Lord of the Rings. This looks to be less about characterisation and long term character development than it is a heavily instanced beat 'em up you can play with mates online but it looks to be great for the twitchy adrenaline junkies.

Roma Victor

Real-time combat, lots of crafting skills, lots of emphasis on player housing, no character levels and a 'realistic' system of combat and wounding and death are just some of the elements of this interesting looking game. Set up against the majestic Roman Empire, Roma Victor might be a bit of a slower play and, honestly, I can't actually see what you do, but it looks to be one of the best researched and elaborate immersions yet devised. Definitely one to keep an eye on. Gods and Heroes, another Roman themed game that looks to sacrifice depth of world with more punching looks promising as well, with a lot more supernatural elements.



Hellgate: London

The Diablo crew are back doing what they do best, using increasingly horrifying weapons to exterminate an increasingly horrifying crew of demons. With absolutely gorgeous monster design, a bewildering bestiary of monsters to battle, this one has 'game of the year' written all over it. Speaking personally, there's no game I'm currently looking forward to playing more. Online, there'll be cooperative missions, heavy instancing and PUNCH SHOOT KILL MONSTER KILL VIOLENCE THAT NEVER ENDS! Oooh.

Bots

Another one that seems to be aimed at a younger audience, Bots concentrates on transforming little cartoon robots that battle viruses in cyberspace. Fans of a certain school of Japanese animation styles will be thrilled but it might not be for those who thrive on the more epic storylines.

The Little Guys
continued...

Huxley

Darkfall Online

» Hmmm. Well, it promises all sorts of 'Empires rising and falling' and diplomacy and PvP that has more of a game impact that 'guys, I just owned a level 3 elf!' and all sorts of things but in frighteningly non-specific ways. And as the homepage prominently advertises a dragon mob sort of... flapping away like every other dragon you ever saw there's a reason to be cautious about this game. It all looks a bit like generic RPG stuff to me but here's hoping the whole 'Forge your own Empire!' works out. I fancy myself a living god.

Darkfall Online

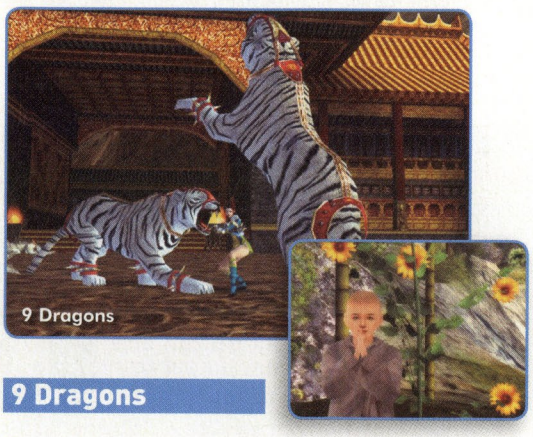
Huxley

» Isn't this based on a Pen and Paper RPG? Anyway, in a post-nuclear holocaust, where mutants rule the earth, fuel is scarce and you can still like Mel Gibson without being called anti-Semitic, this is persistent FPS action just the way you like it. With vehicles to ride in, weird aliens to play and some impressive looking graphics, Huxley promises to deliver the explodo as you like it.

Darkfall Online

Pirates of the Burning Sea

» Just in time to totally miss the buzz from the Pirates films, Burning Sea is an ambitious game from an indie house looking to do great things. Good looking graphics, your own ever loving pirate ship with a setting everyone likes. Personally, unless there's an option to remove griefers from your guild by walking the plank, I'ma be all pissed off. Here's hoping the can come up with a really good social system, which is where this game will shine. That and elaborate 'grog' coding. Oh yes.

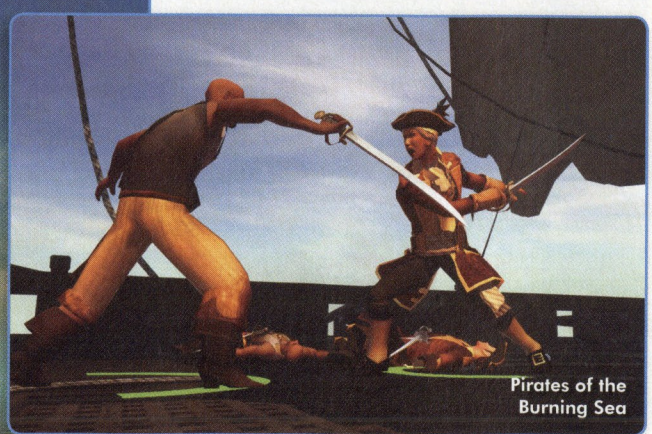

9 Dragons

9 Dragons

» See, now this looks interesting. 9 Dragons looks to be 'Jade Empire: Online', in a nutshell. Produced by a Korean company and a big seller over there, 9 Dragons looks set to impress. It's actually been up and running on English servers for a while but has been slow in picking up attention. Based around martial arts in an Asian style fantasy world, it looks to be one for the combat junkies and hyper competitive PvP types. Or those who simply want to get their fill of high Wuxia style gaming.

So there it is. It's nice to see some breaking genres but nothing that yet really looks like the Holy Grail – the WoW Killer.

Pirates of the Burning Sea


Pirates of the Burning Sea

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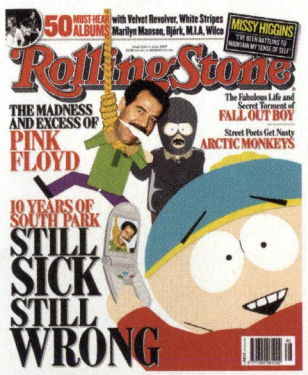

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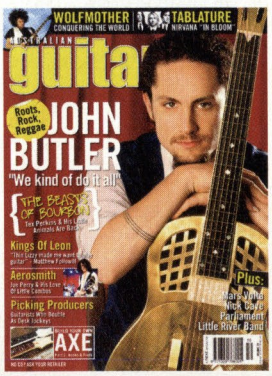

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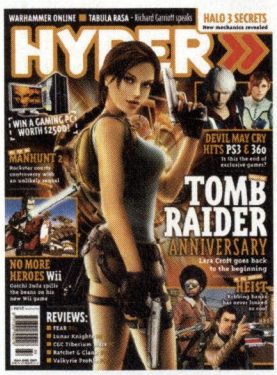

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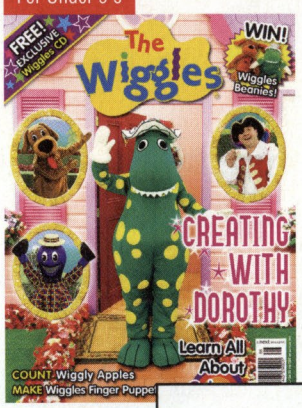

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GP2X

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.GP2X.NET.AU** / PRICE: **$299**

The GP2X has been around since last year, but since we've never run any coverage whatsoever on the console, and since it is only now receiving a very cool peripheral (see below), we thought we'd be doing you, the reader, a disservice if we didn't finally review what is considered by many to be the ultimate homebrew handheld console. Once we played the GP2X for ourselves, we could certainly see why it has earned such a reputation.

Even with batteries in, the GP2X is incredibly light. It feels comfortable to hold, and the trigger buttons and thumb stick are perfectly placed, and while the four face buttons are just a little too close together for our tastes, they still get the job done. The screen is a 3.5-inch LCD, and looks pretty gorgeous running both movies and games, and the console's storage format is the cheap and plentiful SD Card.

The GP2X also comes with a number of built-in games out of the box, and there are a few commercial games available to buy, but the real reason to pick up a GP2X is the variety of open-source and homebrew software available for it.

There are hundreds of homebrew GP2X games available and a number of classic PC games have been interpreted to work on the console (including Doom and Quake), as well as innumerable other freeware applications.

For many though, the best feature of the GP2X is that you can play your retro game collection on it. Emulators for the NES, SNES, Megadrive Mega CD, MAME and many more are available, and providing you own the games you're emulating, it's definitely one of the console's coolest features. You can even read eBooks on it, if gaming is too action-packed a pastime for you.

The software development kit for the GP2X is freely available, so aspiring or experienced programmers can immediately start coding their own software for the console.

The one gripe that we do have with the GP2X is that it is powered by two AA batteries instead of built-in rechargeable power source like the DS or PSP. This of course can be overcome with the use of rechargeable AAs, but we would have preferred otherwise.

Nevertheless, the GP2X may be a niche console, but for those with an interest in open source software, playing your retro game collection and a variety of other media on the go, or if you're a programmer who wants to create some handheld projects, you could hardly go past the GP2X.

GP2X CRADLE

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.GP2X.NET.AU** / PRICE: **$89**

The GP2X is cool on it's own, but if you want to take your handheld content and put it on the big screen, or use a variety of USB peripherals and external memory drives on your console – then you're going to need the GP2X Cradle.

By slotting your GP2X into the top of the cradle, it essentially becomes a very small home console. The Cradle outputs audio via a pair of standard stereo composite cables, while the video signal is carried with an S-Video cable, and once it's hooked up to a television anything you can play on your GP2X can also be played on your TV.

Via four USB 2.0 ports at the front of the unit you can attach peripherals like joysticks, gamepads, keyboards, mice to control your games and apps, and you can even hook up a few USB thumb-drives or portable hard disks to provide even more storage capabilities.

While all those functions are very cool, the Cradle is actually mostly meant for software developers, and it even includes a serial port and a parallel port to allow coders ease of access to the console's internals, which makes the Cradle both a fun and functional peripheral for the GP2X console.

Wii SHARP SHOOTER

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.JOYTECH.NET** / PRICE: **$29.95**

Given it's out-of the-box light-gun capabilities the Wii is pretty much the perfect console for gun-shooting games, so it couldn't have been too long before someone at Joytech came up with the idea for the Sharp Shooter.

The Sharp Shooter is a peripheral that combines both your wiimote and nunchuk into a device that somewhat resembles a NES-era zapper gun. The plastic shell turns your wiimote into the barrel of the zapper, whilst in the nunchuk is turned into the handle of the contraption.

Once you've set it up, it's time to get shooting. If you're holding the Sharp Shooter only by the handle, you may notice that it does feel a bit too top-heavy to really be practical over long gaming sessions, but that is a worry that will quickly pass once you realise that there are presently no Wii games that will allow you to hold the Sharp Shooter like a pistol.

Instead, you'll have to hold the Sharp Shooter like a rifle, and use the wiimote's B-button as the trigger, which is unfortunately positioned at the front of the unit, somewhat killing the cool-factor that usually accompanies playing with a light-gun.

Using this configuration you can play most of the Wii's simplest shooting games, including the duck hunt game included in Wii Play. Other games, however, like Red Steel, don't work, simply because they require both the wiimote and nunchuk to be independent of each other to accomplish tasks like opening doors and sword fighting.

Which essentially means that while the Sharp Shooter is a novel idea, it's a little bit ahead of its time. Had there been a variety of games that could utilise the peripheral as it was properly intended, then the Sharp Shooter would have been quite a cool little gadget. As it stands though, we'd probably only recommend picking it up if you're a die-hard duck hunt fan.

WinWinWin

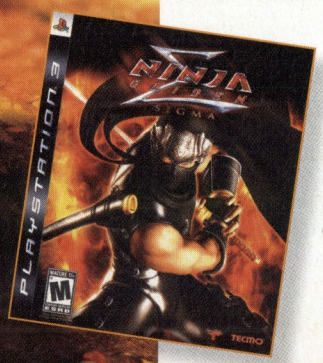
WIN NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA FOR PS3!

>> Ninjas are cool, and by cool, we mean totally sweet. While Ninja Gaiden Sigma may be just a gussied up remake of the original Ninja Gaiden game, it's still cool, and by cool, we also mean totally sweet.

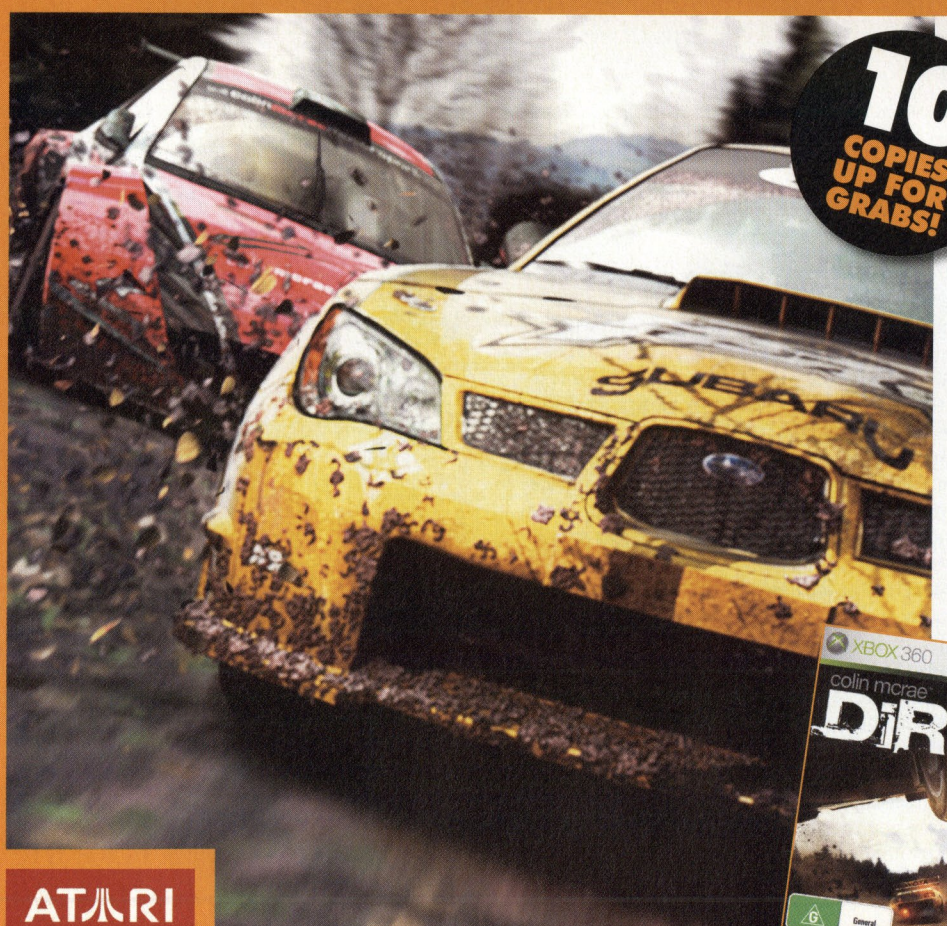
Ryo Hayabusa once again goes after revenge for his massacred clan of Dragon Ninjas, and you get to reap the joyous gameplay rewards, with some of the most varied and deep combat ever seen in an action/adventure game. If you want to check it out for yourself, then you're in luck.

All you need to do to win a copy of Ninja Gaiden Sigma on PS3 is to riddle us this:

>> What are the three undeniable truths about ninjas?



Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Real Ultimate Power, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

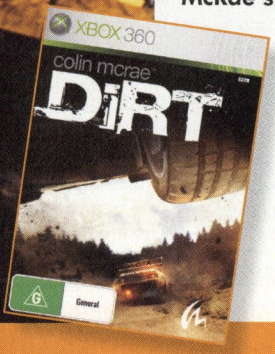


WIN COLIN MCRAE: DIRT FOR XBOX 360!

>>If you have eyes (and if you're reading this text there's a very good chance that you do), then you will like Colin McRae: DIRT. This game is so gorgeous-looking that not only will you not know whether you're looking at a real-life rally or if you're playing a game, but you won't care either.

If you want to know why that game is called DIRT, then you need look no further than the deformable track that your car leaves tyre marks on, as well as the never-ending spray of mud. All you need to do to get a taste of Colin McRae: DIRT for Xbox 360 is to is to answer the following dirt-related question:

>> What's do you think has been the hardest to remove stain on Colin McRae's team jumpsuit?



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Win Win Win

WIN OVERLORD FOR XBOX 360!

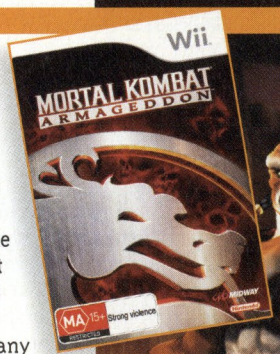
>> Getting real minions can be an expensive endeavour. Not only that, but while most real-world minions do have cool names like Jeeves, and will probably bring you cocktails and canapés while you recline by the pool, when it comes to ordering them to perform acts of unspeakable evil they usually just hand in their resignation, or worse yet, contact the Minion's Union.

You'll have no such problems with the minions in Codemaster's new evil master-simulator, Overlord, however, since these little bastards are gagging to do your sinister bidding. In this game you'll get the chance to control a horde of gremlin-like creatures, whose sole aim is to assist you in becoming the new ruler of the land. All you need to do to win a copy of Overlord for Xbox 360 is to answer the following question:

>> If you had your own minions what would you make them do?

Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Another Cocktail, Jeeves, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

WIN MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON FOR Wii!



>> We don't know about you, but performing fatalities on an ordinary gamepad or arcade stick has never quite felt right. To get that true "freshly-killed" feeling you really need to get your whole body involved – and now, thanks to Nintendo's Wii – you can.

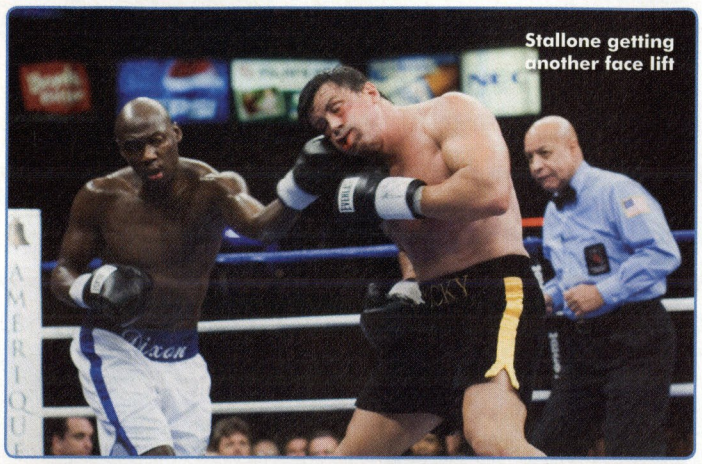
Featuring the biggest character roster of any MK game (more than 60 fighters), as well as some exclusive wiimote controls this is a game no Mortal Kombat fan would want to miss out on.

All you need to do to score yourself a copy of Mortal Kombat: Armageddon is to get out you pens and pencils (or get on MS Paint) and **draw us a picture of what your best fatality would be** if you were a combatant in the Mortal Kombat tournament.

The competition will be judged on how hard it makes us laugh, and not just on artistic talent, so even if you can't draw to save you life you're still in with a chance!

Send your artworks, with your name and address to: **Get Over Here!, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

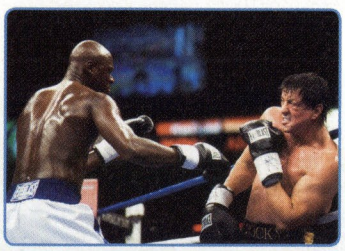
Terms & Conditions: 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am June 12 2007 and entries close at 6pm July 18, 2007. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am July 19, 2007 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners names will be published in the September issue of Hyper on sale August 8. 9) 10 Winners will receive a copy of Ninja Gaiden Sigma on PS3 (RRP: $109.95). Total competition value $1099.50. 10 winners will each receive one copy of Overlord for Xbox 360 (RRP: $109.95). Total value of the competition is $1099.50. 10 winners will receive a copy of Colin McRae: DIRT on Xbox 360 (RRP: $109.95). Total value of the competition is: $1099.50. 5 winners will receive a copy of Mortal Kombat: Armageddon on Wii (RRP: $99.95). Total competition value $499.75. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

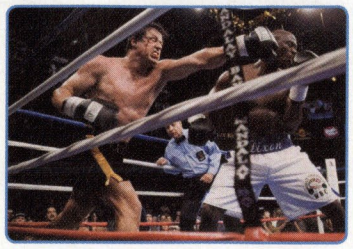

Stallone getting another face lift

Rocky Balboa

FOX, M

If anything, Rocky Balboa is the filmic equivalent of comfort food. From the first frame you know what you can expect, what is going to happen in what order, what people are going to say when their pivotal scene comes and how everything is going to wrap up but like comfort food, familiarity does not breed contempt but rather a feeling of intense satisfaction. Seeing Rocky run up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum still elicits cheers and a warm fuzzy feeling. Listening to the Italian Stallion rattle off some down-home meathead philosophy is heart-warming and seeing the underdog triumphant will always bring a smile to your face. Yes, nearly all of the material in Rocky Balboa

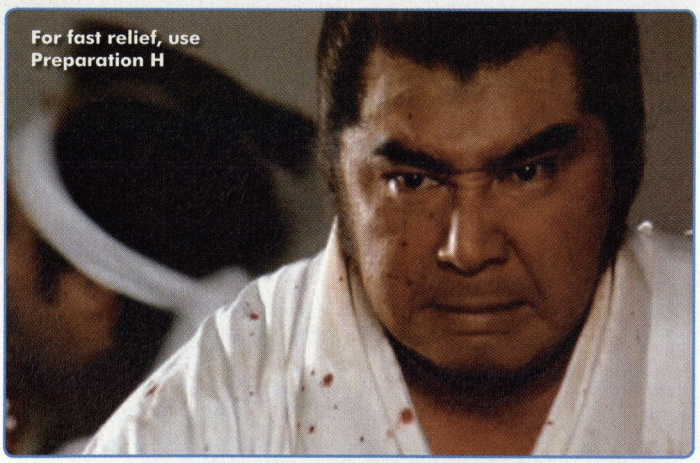




[above] PAAAANCH!

treads a path that the series has gone down multiple times before but this is the first true sequel since Rocky 2, as it's more concerned with character development and the emotional impact of events than the final reel slugfest. It's also a movie that shows once again that old Sly isn't a half bad actor when he puts his mind to it, and a dab hand with a pen as well, crafting some nice believable dialogue (as well as a few ham-fisted but well delivered emotional monologues). Fingers crossed that the same level of respect, love and skill goes into the crafting of the upcoming John Rambo. Unfortunately, after seeing the incredibly gory teaser, that doesn't look too likely.

FILM: 7 / FEATURES: TBA


For fast relief, use Preparation H

Shogun Assassin

MADMAN, R18+

Even if you haven't seen Shogun Assassin yet, if you have any interest at all in Japanese cinema you may already be familiar with the film's now infamous origins.

Shogun Assassin is actually two movies in one, melding together the first two films in the cult classic Lone Wolf and Cub series. In 1980 American producer David Weisman and director Robert Houston discovered Lone Wolf and Cub: Sword of Vengeance, and its sequel, Baby Cart at the River Styx, both which originally released in Japan in 1972, and were incredibly popular in their native Japan.

Although the original films contained some dramatic fights scenes and incredibly violent swordplay, the action was often broken up with something that Weisman and Houston didn't think the American public would be too keen on – dialogue, story and character development. So they took both films into the cutting room, and when they emerged, there was one movie were there once was two.

Much of the first part of the film is taken from Sword of Vengeance, including flashbacks showing how the two protagonists, Ogami (Tomisaburo Wakayama) and his infant son Daigoro became Japan's most feared assassins, while the rest of the movie is made up of a heavily edited and simplified version of Baby Cart at the River Styx. The resulting film is an almost non-stop stream of spectacular fight sequences and beheadings, and only loosely follows the original films' storylines.

The dubbed voice-over is fittingly camp, while the original music was replaced by a pretty decent, but completely out of place, 1980s synth soundtrack.

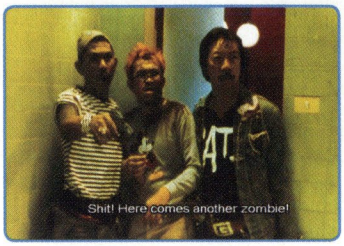
While this may make Shogun Assassin a film to avoid for Japanese cinema purists, even without the narrative context of the original Lone Wolf and Cub films, the seemingly endless stream of spectacular action sequences still make Shogun Assassin riveting viewing.

The special features are unspecified at the time of going to print, but the DVD transfer, while it isn't pristine, is good for a film of its age, making Shogun Assassin essential viewing for fans of samurai action, just so long as you leave your purist cinema-snob hat at the door.

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: TBA

Sars Wars: Bangkok Zombie Crisis

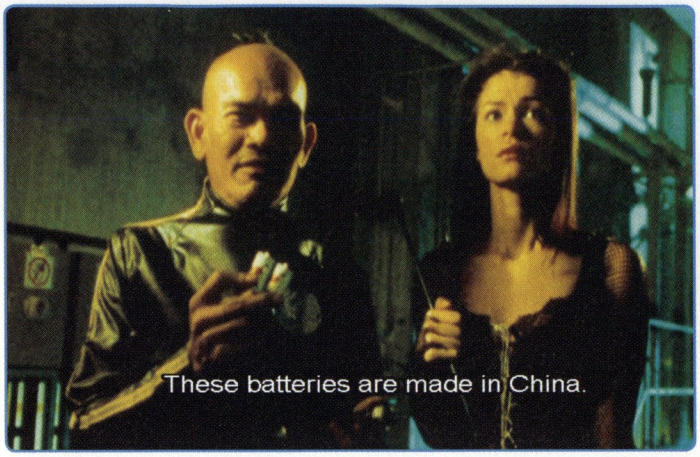
DISCOTEK, NR



[above] I'd worry more about the clothes than the undead

How can you not fall in love with a movie with a title as awesome as this? In one of the coolest movies to come around in a long time, a fourth SARS epidemic hits Africa but instead of infecting the lungs, SARS 4 turns the victims into flesh-crazed zombies. If that doesn't automatically appeal to you then something's wrong. The insect borne plague spreads to Thailand, infecting an apartment block, a building that the Thai army plans to blow up to stop the spread of infection. At the same time the unbelievably good-looking catholic schoolgirl daughter of a rich Thai businessman is kidnapped prompting him to call on the services of a battery powered lightsabre wielding aging hero and his deep voiced sidekick. Of course, just to throw an extra spanner in the works the girl is being held in the very building with the SARS outbreak. Oh yeah, there's a sexy hotpants and fishnets clad scientist in the movie too. It's hard to review a film like Sars Wars without ruining the fun of the film. Like Wild Zero (a film it references more than once), knowing the twists and turns, as well as the bizarre non-sequitur humour kills half the fun. If you've laughed yourself silly watching Wild Zero, Versus, Kung Fu Hustle or Robin Hood: Men in Tights you owe it to yourself to see Sars Wars.

FILM: 9 / FEATURES: 6



Déjà Vu

TOUCHSTONE, M15+

It would be a pretty cheap play on worlds for me to say that Déjà Vu is the kind of movie that you feel like you've seen a hundred times before, but that's more or less where my assessment of the Jerry Bruckheimer-produced, Tony Scott-directed, Denzel Washington-vehicle is headed.

"The Denzel" plays Doug Carlin, a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent who find himself part of an investigation into the terrorist bombing of a New Orleans' ferry. Despite being nowhere near qualified to investigate homicide, The Denzel does it anyway, eventually discovering the body of Claire Kuchever (Paula Patton), a beautiful woman who was murdered and made to look like a victim of the ferry bombing.

From here things get a little science-fiction, with Val Kilmer recruiting The Denzel to be part of his surveillance team that somehow has access to a machine that can see five days into that past. Using this machine The Denzel watches the last five days of Claire Kuchever's life, looking for clues to her death, the terrorist attack and very slowly forming some "more than friends" feelings for the beautiful corpse.

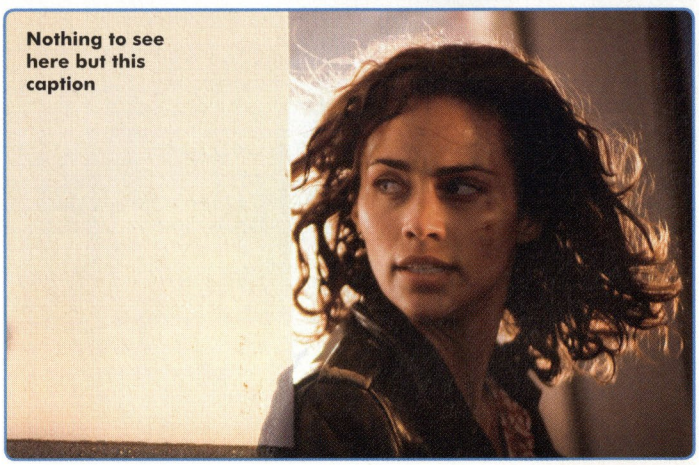
I won't spoil you with any more plot, but needless to say The Denzel does eventually find a way to use the machine for more than just viewing the past, and the ensuing time-travel story is loaded with the same question that so many films have tackled in the past: if you travel back in time, can you change the future?

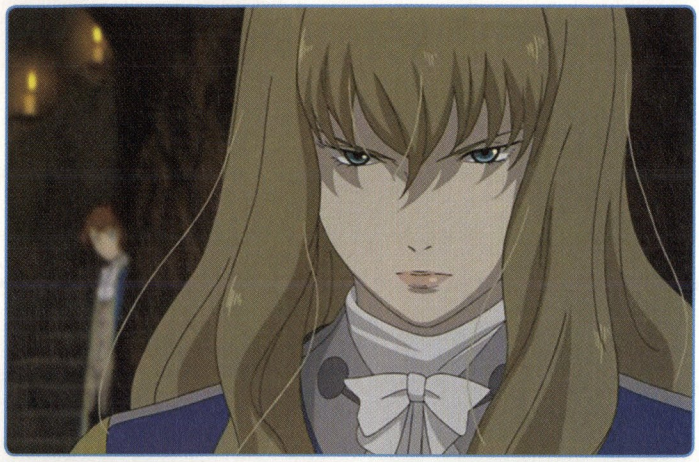
Tony Scott answers this question with a lot of explosions, a hail of bullets, some fun but nonsensical time-travel logic and a fairly preposterous ending.

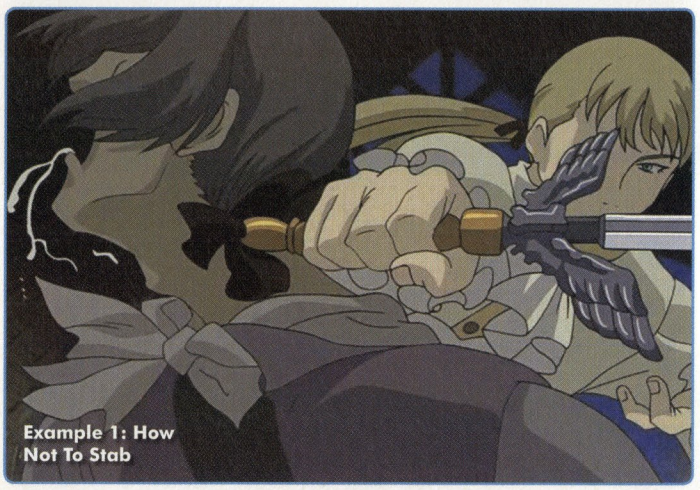
The film looks great though, and the special features include a pretty cool audio commentary with Bruckheimer and Scott, that also features behind-the-scenes documentaries that interrupt the film to explain more about its production.

In the end, it's all standard blockbuster action flick fair, but that's nothing that can't be solved by shutting down all but the most primitive parts of your brain. If you do you'll find that Déjà Vu is a pretty entertaining, but overly conventional sci-fi action film.

FILM: 6 / FEATURES: 5







Example 1: How Not To Stab

Le Chevalier d'Eon

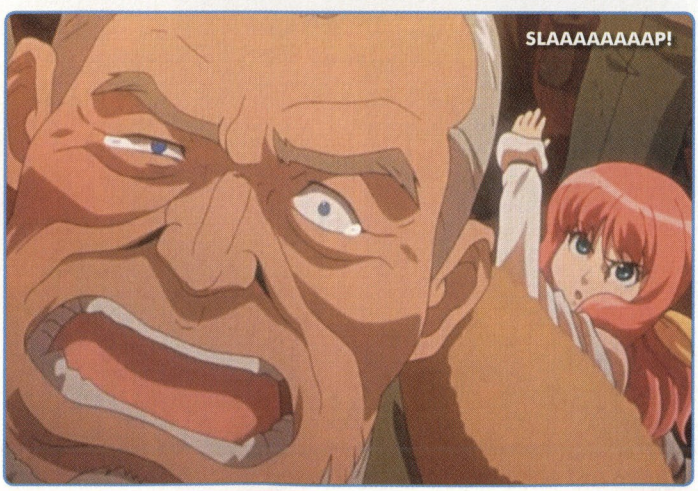
VOLUME 1: PSALM OF VENGEANCE

PRODUCTION: PRODUCTION I.G.
GENRE: SUPERNATURAL MYSTERY

Loosely based on the life of Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothée Éon de Beaumont, a French nobleman and King Louis XV's secret police who reportedly infiltrated the Russian court dressed as a woman and spent much of his life as a woman upon returning to France, Le Chevalier d'Eon is without a doubt the best French period mystery/fantasy action/cross-dressing/political intrigue anime you will see all year. After his sister is murdered and embalmed with mercury, stopping the corpse from rotting and therefore disallowing a Christian burial, condemning her soul to remain on earth, a young nobleman joins the King's secret police to discover the truth behind her death and the significance of the word "psalms" written on the lid of the coffin in which she was found. Along the way to the truth he becomes involved with political machinations that could destabilise the empire, a web of magic and mysticism and a whole load of zombies. Luckily the chevalier is not alone in his quest – even though she is dead, d'Eon's sister stays with him; a brilliant swordswoman in life she infuses him with an ability to fight when the need arises. She also turns him into a woman.

Once again Production I.G. have pulled out all the stops with a breathtaking new series. The balance of intrigue and action is nigh on perfect. Though some may find the first few episodes a little slow but the engrossing narrative more than makes up for the pacing. Character design, voice acting and soundtrack are also of a superb quality. We can't wait to see the rest of the series.

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 9
EXTRAS: 6 / **OVERALL: 9**



Coyote Ragtime Show V1 - FOXTROT

PRODUCTION: UFOTABLE
GENRE: SCI FI ACTION

With a name like Coyote Ragtime Show you could be forgiven in thinking that it's something of a Cowboy Bebop rip-off and in part you'd be right – it's an action packed show with a soundtrack that uses a lot of brass about some loveable rogues in space but that's about where the similarity ends. Whereas Bebop is a clever show with lots of nuance, well written characters and great plots, Ragtime is balls to the wall action with a rather hard to empathise with main character - a middle aged "coyote" (space pirate) who goes by the name of Mister – and a plot revolving around having to scour a planet about to be blown up by the fascist space government for treasure hidden there by the dead pirate father of the other lead character, a feisty young girl who exhibits every feisty young girl cliché in the anime handbook. That's not to say the show isn't any good – as straight out mindless action, Coyote Ragtime is a lot of fun, thanks most to the cast of supporting characters, the strongest being the Twelve Sisters, 12 homicidal paratrooper gothic-lolita robot assassins. I'll say that again – 12 homicidal paratrooper goth-loli assassins – what's not to love about that. While the storytelling and pacing of Coyote Ragtime leave a little something to be desired, the character design and animation is universally excellent, if a little overly fan-service in parts – the camera seems to focus on the lead girl's arse far more than it does her face.

If you want clever action with deep, well rounded characters you may want to look elsewhere, but for some mindless fun featuring robotic goth-loli killers, Coyote Ragtime Show should fit the bill.

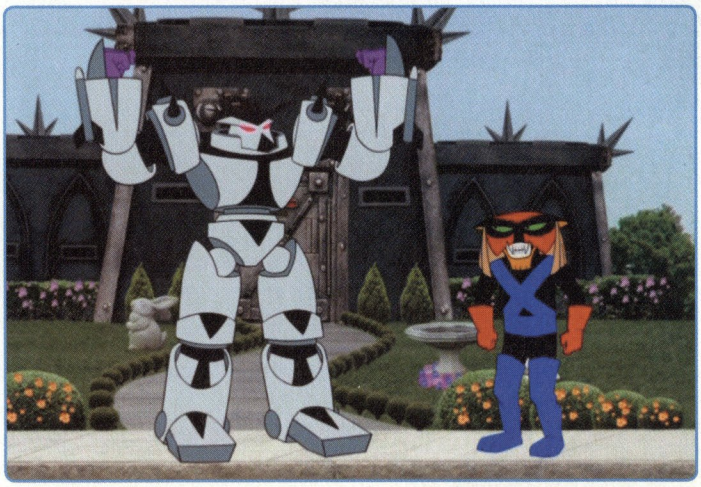
ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 7
EXTRAS: 4 / **OVERALL: 7**

The Brak Show SEASON 1

MADMAN, M

A spin-off of a spin-off, The Brak Show takes viewers into the innocent world of a teenage Brak, a well meaning but somewhat stupid cat-creature boy who will one day grow up to be one of Space Ghost's greatest enemies. Set in a parody of Leave it to Beaver white-bread suburbia, Brak lives with his masked mother, diminutive latin father and hangs around with his best friend/enemy, the evil preying mantis alien Zorak. They have adventures, often involving the super destructive robot warrior who lives down the street and has a penchant for landscape gardening and blowing stuff up, Thundercleese. And Brak sings. He sings about everything, from what you can feed fish (Three hams will fill him, three hams will kill him, I shouldn't feed him – THREE HAMS!) to alien squid who want to do naughty things to his mother. Aside from Brak himself, the other funniest part of the show is invariably Brak's father, a hilariously lazy, chauvinistic and narcissistic midget who does very little but sit at the kitchen table reading the paper and delivering non-sequitur life advice to his son as well as often preaching the "moral" of the episode. It's all very strange and crude but the character of Brak is so sweetly naïve and good natured that he coasts above everything that happens, further adding to the overall hilarity. Along with the nine episodes, the first season boxed set contains some great special features, not limited to a truly funny in-character commentary and a very informative (yet still very funny) production commentary track.

[above] A typical day at the Branscombe house

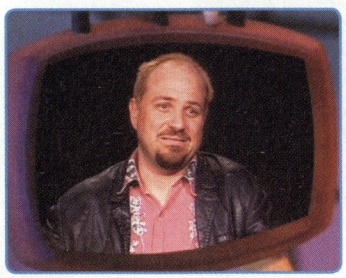


FILM: 9 / FEATURES: 8

Space Ghost Coast to Coast VOL. 1

MADMAN, M

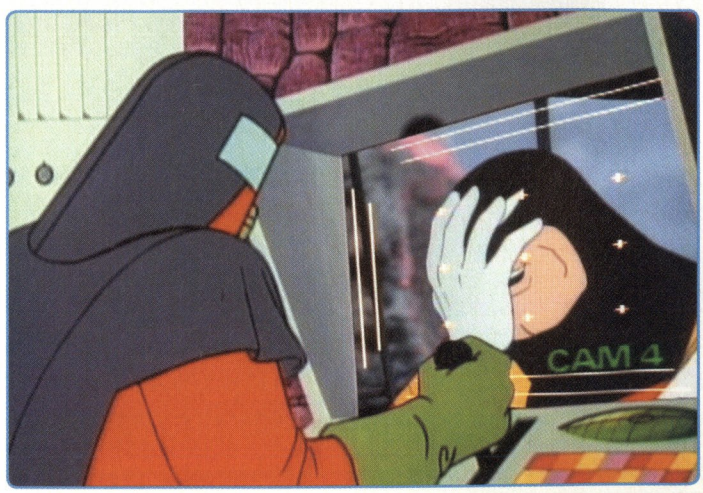
Probably the weakest show in the Adult Swim line-up, Space Ghost Coast to Coast takes a little known cartoon superhero of the late 60s, Space Ghost and gives him a talk show, enabling the producers to simultaneously parody the terrible animation of the early Hanna-Barbera cartoons as well as the formulaic antics of comedy talk show hosts like David Letterman and Jay Leno. Each episode sees Space Ghost having passive aggressive confrontations with two of his old arch nemesis, Zorak and Moltar the Lava Man, now his band leader and director respectively, as well as interviewing either a washed up star or someone who doesn't know what type of show they're being interviewed for. While the 12 odd minute episodes are quite funny individually, the show's central gimmicks become repetitive quite quickly so watching multiple episodes in a row does nothing but detract from the humour, not enhance it; ironic really considering that one of the main points of the show is to lampoon the formulaic nature of talk shows.



[above] Shakes the Clown: Behind the Makeup

Interestingly, although the box set is labelled as Volume 1 it does not contain all of season 1, rather 16 choice episodes from the first three seasons shown out of chronological order. As far as special features are concerned we get five or so audio commentaries that don't cover much more that taking some potshots at the clueless has beens being interviewed, some artwork and one real gem, a music video called "Zorak Does Jingle Bells", which is staggeringly funny.

FILM: 7 / FEATURES: 5



COLLECTIONS

BY ERIN MARCON

They carry us within their wombs and endure the excruciating pain of childbirth. They encourage our endeavours, celebrate our little triumphs and tend to our wounds. It is fortunate that these creatures enjoy our warmest affections because they are also prone to a wicked indifference seemingly at odds with their otherwise altruistic characters. Only a mother would dare dispose of our Atari and Intellivision cartridges. Only a mother could be forgiven for such a diabolical transgression.

Long before he became Edge of Reality's Creative Director, Mark Nau was forced to forgive his mother for just such an offence. "Unfortunately my mother wasn't as big a fan of keeping things as I was," he recalls, "and she sold most of my games at an ill-fated garage sale in 1982. Thanks Mom. If we sort of steer away from that painful memory, I'd say I started going back and looking for some older games when I was in my early twenties..."

His collection today demonstrates a proclivity for NES and Dreamcast classics. He describes himself as a "huge fan" of Hideo Kojima's 'Metal Gear' series of stealth-action titles, declaring that the NES original boasted a level of gameplay "above and beyond" its contemporaries. He also happily acknowledges the influence that it has had on his work. Edge of Reality's forthcoming 'Cipher Complex' is being positioned as a more aggressive stealth experience, but according to Nau, it will also pay homage to some of the genre conventions established by predecessors such as 'Metal Gear' and 'Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell'.

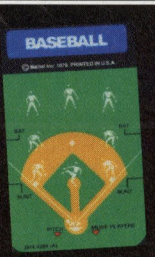
Nau selects a hypnotic cult classic as another of the highlights of his collection. "To get a bit more contemporary," he says, "I'm also a fan of 'Rez' - Dreamcast version of course - for the amazingly simple yet involved graphics and gameplay. I know it's got some inflated prices right now on eBay and it's a highly recommended game. If you can find it, give it a shot. It's worth it."

The final title identified by Nau isn't in his collection at all. It is, rather, an object of desire. "If the world was a perfect place and I had money pouring out of my ears," he says, "I'd probably try to get my hands on one of those 1990 Nintendo World Championship cartridges."

"Now that's a holy grail if I've ever seen one..."

The cartridges in question feature segments of 'Super Mario Brothers', 'Rad Racer' and 'Tetris'. Contestants were obliged to attempt all three challenges as they strived to claim the coveted title of 'world champion'.

It was subsequently revealed that a mere 116 cartridges were produced. Naturally, it has become a highly coveted collector's item. If 'Cipher Complex' is a runaway hit and Nau's ears become cascades of currency, he will need to shell out at least four figures to secure such an important artefact of Nintendo's gloried past. Will it erase the pain of watching his mother sell-off his childhood treasures? Perhaps not, but it will make him the envy of collectors worldwide.



Mark Nau waxes lyrical about his favourite console: *"Well, as you can probably tell from my picture, I'm pretty partial to this Intellivision. It was my first system ever. Needless to say it's pretty important to me. As you can see it's still in perfect working order as are all the games. I'm rocking out some 'Major League Baseball' in this pic. The system has been a staple of my collection since day one and it holds a big place in my heart."*

Hyper would like to thank Mark Nau for participating in this month's column. Join us next month as we delve into the collection of Silicon Knights' Henry Sterchi!

Cipher Complex

Meet Mark Nau

Mark Nau is a key member of the management team at Edge of Reality, the Texan studio responsible for the console version of 'The Sims'. Prior to this appointment, Nau contributed to Treyarch's 'Call of Duty: Finest Hour' and 'Spiderman 2'. His arrival at Edge of Reality coincided with the decision to develop 'Cipher Complex', the company's first original title.

WinWinWin

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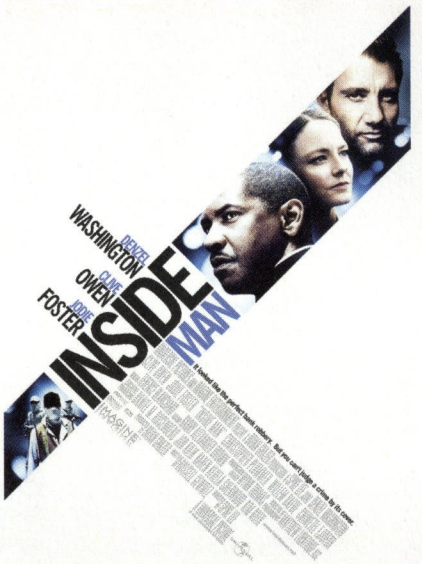
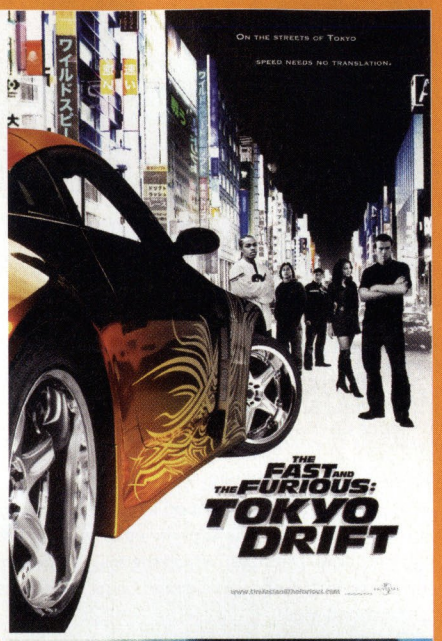
>> Downloading, it's the best thing since sliced bread. That of course begs the question, "what was the best thing before sliced bread?" but such speculation is outside the purview of this competition. We're here to talk about downloading. Legal downloading that is. Not the illegal piracy kind. That's illegal and bad, though being a pirate does give you leave to wear eye patches and other awesome accoutrements, all of which is totally beside the point.

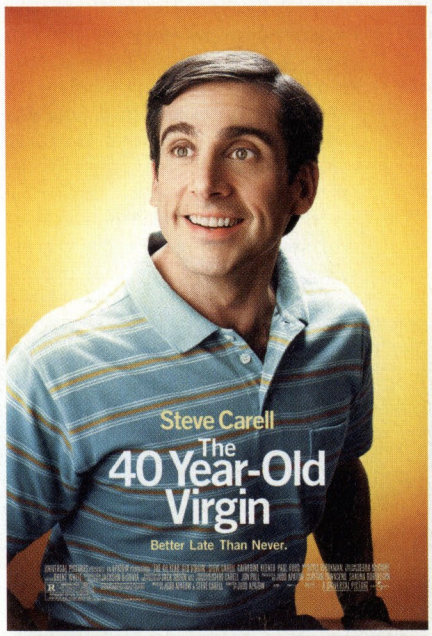
ReelTime.tv is Australia's first legal movie and TV download service with a huge selection of movies and TV from around the world that can be downloaded either to own or rent, as well as a wide range of games that can be purchased on hard copy at better than retail prices and delivered overnight direct to your door. Reeltime.tv also have PC games available for download.

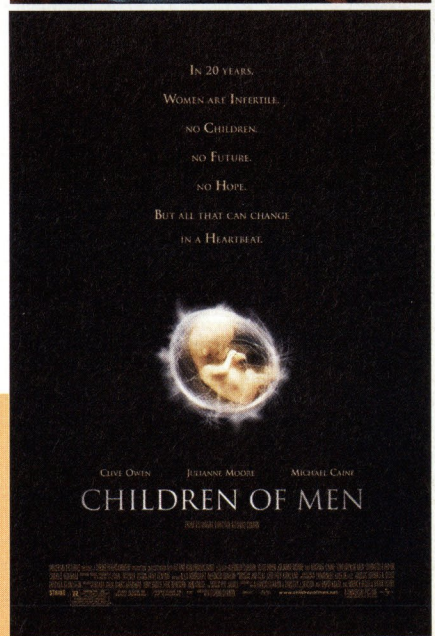
Thanks to the good people at ReelTime.tv we have 20 vouchers to give away, each valued at $50 that can be redeemed to rent downloadable movies. How sweet is that? All you have to do to win one of these vouchers is **explain, in 50 words or less why piracy is bad.**

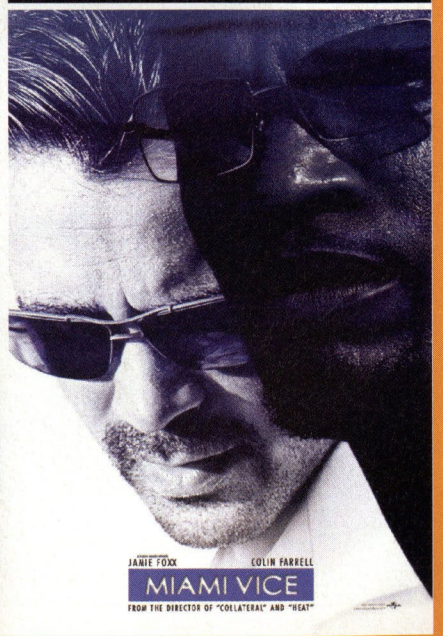
Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Download me Hearties!, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.











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The WOW Chronicles

F&@# World of Warcraft. In it's botty.

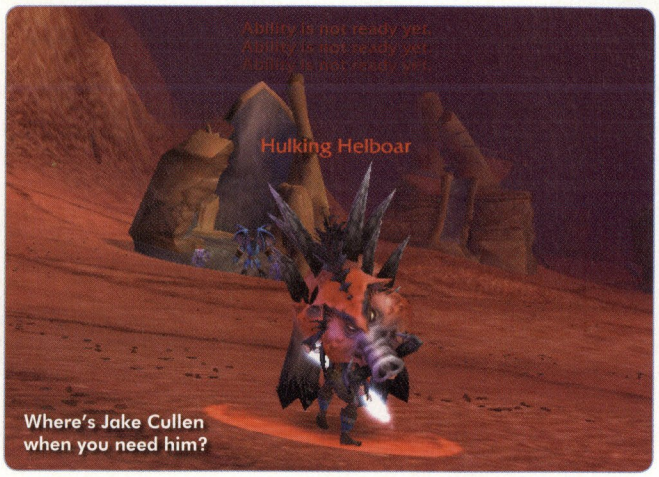
GRINNING

That's today's column. To hell with it. I'm so goddamned sick of it. I hate my guild, I hate Burning Crusade, I hate my character, I hate it I hate it I hate it. I want to punch its stupid crafty little face in.

I'm having problems moving past being level 60. Times was, having a sixty meant you were a big deal, the heavyweight gorilla. Now, it means precisely nothing. It means you'll think you are tough as hell but, guess what son? Burning Crusade will still eat a sixty alive. What's worse, poor old Jack the Grin jumped in at 58, without any tiered items, without the experience of running the big endgame instances. Which means, I'm getting pwned by f&@#ing pigs. Demons pigs, sure but still, goddamned pigs.

Then my guild breaks up. I love my guild. I had about 12 players in it but they were cool players. They were friendly. I liked them. They all gave me cool stuff and took me on instance runs and told me very useful information and laughed at my jokes. But it was not to be. They were all refuges from a big guild and eventually went back. That disappointed me.

My new guild... man, there's nothing like being a fifth wheel. A tight crew run by a husband a wife, they've all been together for ages and ages. Which means when I say 'come help me in Hellfire Ramparts,' they go 'hmm. Yeah. Whatever.' But when one of the old school crew asks for a run, four Seventies go out of their way to help! It ain't right! What's more important is that it's depressing. I'm just feeling like I'm spinning my wheels. But what's even more important than that is that... It's boring. In despair, I load up an old friend, Grinning the Mage. Who I discover requires a complete repair and is in the incredibly boring Arathi Highlands, perhaps the most boring part of the entire world. No.



Where's Jake Cullen when you need him?

Back to Jack and I decide to power through Hellfire Peninsula, seeing exciting new content. The exciting new content is orcs and pigs. And ghosts. And a boring PVP scenario. And the frigging Ravagers just chop the hell out of me. I want a flying mount but at a thousand gold, I really don't know if I have the stamina to reach it. Gold drops easily in Outland but not that easily. My auctions are failing to sell because all the blue stuff coming out of instances is what people are after. And because everyone is rich, now, they ain't bothering with greens dropped by slimes.

For the first time in a year, I'm thoroughly dispirited by the game. I'm bored. I stop logging in and start watching infomercials. I play for half an hour and turn it off. I can't even be bothered checking Thottbot.

All seems dark for the future. I ponder, closely, the once unthinkable. Cancelling my account.

Next month – *Is this the end?*

HYPER Game Retailer Offers

	STORE NAME	LOCATION	OFFER
BurnDirect	**Burn Direct** *www.burn.com.au*	Online Retailer	Hyper & PC PowerPlay readers only, save up to 20% off New Games Movies & Music! Check our site for deals! ***http://burn.com.au/hyper***
ezygames.com.au	**EzyGames** *www.ezygames.com.au*	Online Retailer	Owned and operated by EzyDVD, EzyGames.com.au is now your one-stop-shop for all things gaming!
bgamer.com.au	**Bgamer** *www.bgamer.com.au*	Online Retailer. Based in Byron Bay NSW 02-66809166 Or Info@bgamer.com.au	• Chipped slim Playstation2 with two joypads for $299 • Chipped Nintendo Wii $499 • Play your favourite games in PAL or NTSC!
GAMES WAREHOUSE	**Games Warehouse** *www.gameswarehouse.com.au*	Online Retailer Ph 02 96485656 and Warehouse pickup Silverwater,NSW.	Get great games for your Nintendo DS: Pokemon Diamond, Pokemon Pearl & Puzzle Quest available now!
GAME The next level	**Game** *www.gameswizards.com*	Online Retailer, 24 Stores located in NSW, VIC & ACT. Ph: 13GAME.	Pre-order Grand Theft Auto IV now on the X-Box 360 for only $119.95 inc. GST.
gamezoo	**Gamezoo** *www.gamezoo.com.au*	Online Retailer	Forza Motorsport 2 - SAVE $10.00 OFF RRP! Enter GZFORZA2 during checkout and receive FREE delivery as well.
quikshop	**Quikshop** *www.quikshop.com.au*	Online Retailer: Games, Movies, Phones, Cameras PH: 1300786151	CONSOLES FOR COST!
www.scorptec.com.au scorpion TECHNOLOGY	**Scorpion Technology** *www.scorptec.com.au*	Online Retailer	Purchase the new Logitech G5 Laser Mouse and receive FREE Hyperglide Mouse Skatez. Enter 'HYPER' code during checkout.
	The Gamesmen *www.gamesmen.com.au*	Penshurst 02 9580 9888; Penrith 02 4721 7411; Wollongong 02 4225 2424	Show your copy of Hyper in store to receive 15% OFF* the RRP of all Software. (*Does not apply to internet pricing or already discounted items.)
TRUE GAMER	**True Gamer** *www.truegamer.com.au*	Online Retailer	15% off our already reduced prices during May. Save up to 40%! Simply enter code: IWANT15 at checkout to take advantage of this great offer!

To place an offer in the next issue, please contact Chris at Next Media

PH: 02 9699 0340 **E:** ChrisG@next.com.au

HYPER'S TOP TEN GAME CHARACTERS THAT NEED A JOB! PLEASE

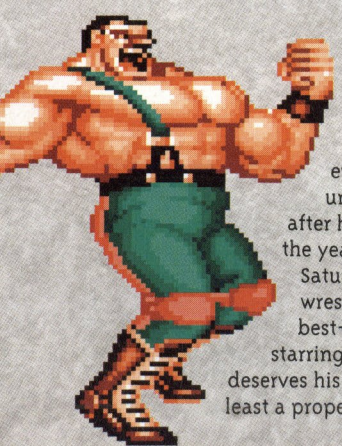
For every one of today's popular game characters, there are a hundred ingenious characters that either never got off the ground, or have unceremoniously faded into obscurity. Join Hyper by celebrating the uncelebrated, with our list of the top-ten game characters who deserve a revival. *By* ***Maurice Branscombe***

MIKE HAGGAR

Best Known For: Final Fight *(Arcade)*

■ Forget Ryu and Ken, Capcom have been sitting on a deep vein of pure untapped game character gold for almost two decades – Mike Haggar.

The former professional wrestler and mayor of Metro City is simply called "Haggar" by his friends, while his enemies usually call him "Aiiieeeee! Stop breaking every bone in my body!" Such is his reputation for dishing the hurt that a certain Russian pro wrestler thieved his patented spinning lariat and pile-driver moves and went on to international success in the Street Fighter series (for shame, Zangief).



Despite being the coolest character to ever wear green overalls with no shirt underneath, Haggar's career stalled after his debut in 1989's Final Fight. Over the years he's had a few bit parts in the Saturday Night Slam Masters series of wrestling games (as well as a role in the best-forgotten Final Fight: Streetwise) but starring roles have thus far eluded him. Haggar deserves his own series of beat 'em ups, or at the very least a proper entry into the Street Fighter series.

KARNOV

Best Known For: Karnov *(Arcade)*

■ What's not to like about Karnov? He is a breathtakingly ugly, morbidly obese Russian circus strongman, whose halitosis is so alcoholically volatile that when he breathes, a searing geyser of flame erupts from his belly, instantly burning all who touch it to a crisp. You just don't get game characters like that anymore.

After his debut in 1987 Karnov insisted on appearing in almost every game produced by his developer, Data East, leading to cameos in many games, including office favourite Bad Dudes Versus Dragon Ninja.

His last hurrah would be in 1994's Karnov's Revenge, a one-on-one fighter, before Data East ceased to exist.

We don't know about you, but we think Karnov's ghastly mug would be a welcome alternative to today's angst-ridden pretty-boys.

BILLY AND JIMMY

■ The paaanch brothers, Billy and Jimmy, kept me poor all throughout my childhood. Every time I'd get my few meagre cents of pocket money, I'd drop it into a Double Dragon machine and promptly begin to virtually act out my wildest juvenile fantasy – murdering street scum with chains and baseball bats. Then I took my brain medicine.

After their 1987 debut, Billy and Jimmy would star in two more scrolling beat 'em up sequels until the '90s saw them turn to the one-on-one fighting genre.

Technos, the series creators, went bankrupt in 1996 and apparently the Double Dragon license is now trapped in legal limbo, with only the "unofficial sequel" Rage of The Dragons releasing in the past decade.

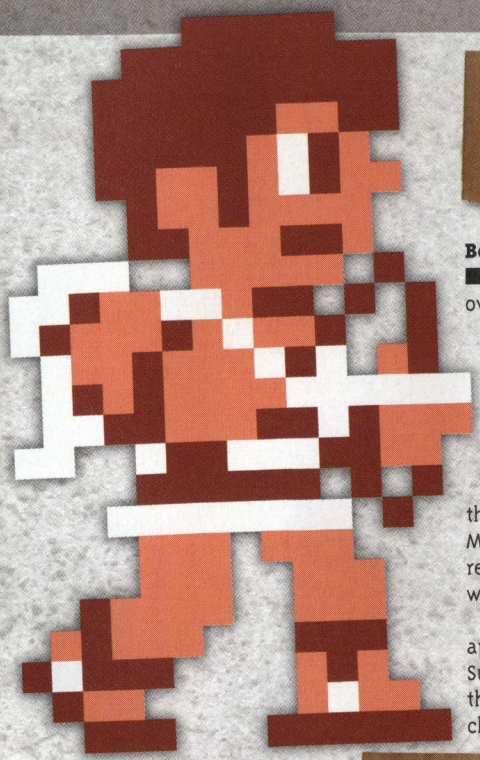
It goes without saying that we need them both back in action, if only so I can beat some more street scum to death.

CAPTAIN N

Best Known For: Captain N: The Game Master *(TV)*

■ Are you surprised to see a cartoon character on this list? Well, don't be – Captain N is a perfect candidate for our little game character job network. The defender of the Nintendo universe has been down and out since his show got cancelled in 1993, but he really should have gotten a game of his own. Can you just imagine playing in a game world that combined practically every NES game imaginable, including Mario, Zelda, Metroid, Mega Man, Castlevania and many more? Armed with Captain N's trademark Zapper™ and NES-pad belt buckle you'd have to defeat Bowser, Ganon, Dr Wiley, Dracula and their respective henchmen. Maybe you'd even get your hands on a Power Glove before your final confrontation with Mother Brain.

Just putting it out there...



PIT

Best Know For: Kid Icarus *(NES)*

■ One of Nintendo's most baffling oversights is that they have left a perfectly good game character on the shelf since the NES days. Pit, the winged, bow-wielding protagonist from Kid Icarus just hasn't been able to hold down a job since 1986. Combining the platforming of Mario with the shooting and exploration of Metroid, Kid Icarus was, and still is, regarded as a classic – so why did we never see another one?

Pit is set to make a playable appearance in the forthcoming Super Smash Bros Brawl, something that will hopefully improve this character's future job prospects.

MONKEY

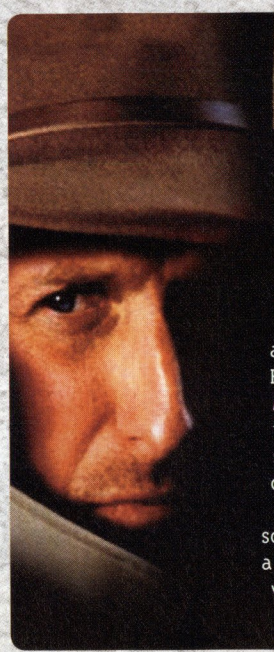
Best Known For: Monkey *(TV)*

■ "In the worlds before Monkey..." wait a minute, you've already seen us recite the opening dialogue from Monkey a million times (and you'll probably see it a million more), but for now lets just say that Monkey is long overdue for a return to videogames.

His first and only appearance in a game was in 1984, in a Commodore 64 game called "Monkey Magic". The game was terrible, but nevertheless the concept of a game where you get to become the staff-wielding, cloud-riding, chest-hair-pulling simian who "LOVES TO FIGGGHHHTT!!!" would be too good not to play.

As long as the original soundtrack and voice actors were on board, we'd be so very in.

TEX MURPHY



Best Known For: Under a Killing Moon *(PC)*

■ Inspired by the office's resident Full-Motion Video game enthusiast (PC Powerplay's Darren Wells) we decided to add Tex Murphy to our list of jobless game characters that need a second chance.

The star of several successful graphic adventures, including the classic Under a Killing Moon, hard-boiled gumshoe Tex Murphy fell victim to the great FMV crash of the late nineties, when FMV games all of a sudden became desperately unpopular and an object of ridicule.

We think that with the right direction and some modern-day gameplay to replace at least a little of that FMV, Tex's post-apocalyptic world and tech-noir stylings could once again be on top.

JUNO, VELA AND LUPUS

Best Known For: Jet Force Gemini *(N64)*

■ Rareware may be on Struggle Street in the good game department these days, but there was a time when everything they touched turned to jewel-encrusted gold. Jet Force Gemini, along with GoldenEye 007, Banjo Kazooie and Donkey Kong 64 was one of those rare (pardon the pun) games that really made most other Nintendo 64 games seem like the work of sedated apes.

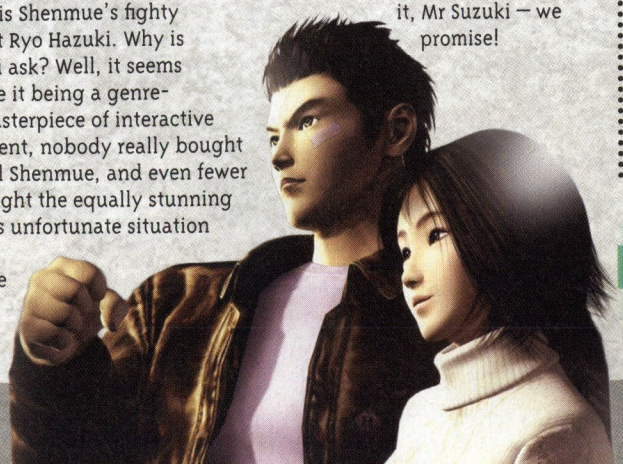
While the action/shooter was brilliantly designed, great fun and packed with more gameplay than you could ever hope for, it sold about five copies, so it will probably never be seen again. We'd still love to see Rare back on top though, and maybe a return for the Gemini twins and their cyborg puppy would do them some good.

RYO HAZUKI

Best Known For: Shenmue *(Dreamcast)*

■ The youngest character on our jobless list is Shenmue's fighty protagonist Ryo Hazuki. Why is he here you ask? Well, it seems that despite it being a genre-busting masterpiece of interactive entertainment, nobody really bought the original Shenmue, and even fewer people bought the equally stunning sequel. This unfortunate situation has meant that despite being only two thirds through a trilogy, there is still no word on whether Shemue III will ever get made. The game's creator, Yu Suzuki, has even suggested that we may get an animated movie to close out the series' story instead of an actual game.

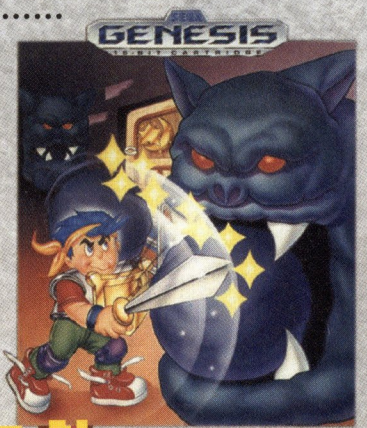
All we can say is that Ryo needs at least one more game. We'll buy it, Mr Suzuki – we promise!

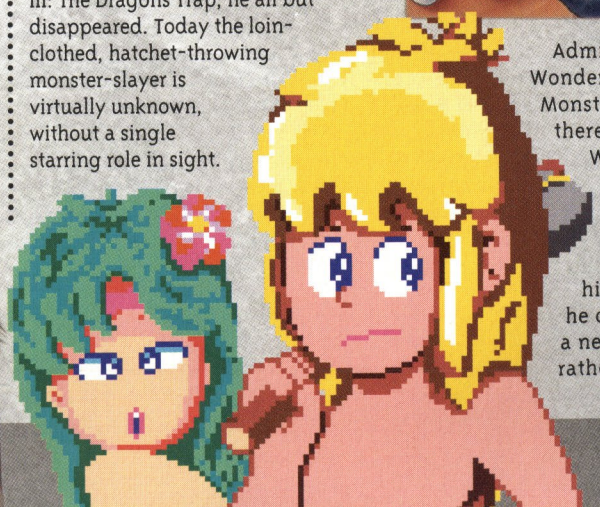


WONDER BOY

Best Known For: Wonder Boy *(Arcade)*

■ What the hell happened to Wonder Boy? After brilliant turns in SEGA's Wonder Boy, Wonder Boy in Monster World, and Wonder Boy III: The Dragons Trap, he all but disappeared. Today the loin-clothed, hatchet-throwing monster-slayer is virtually unknown, without a single starring role in sight.





Admittedly, Wonder Boy III: The Monster's Lair (yes, there were two Wonder Boy IIIs) was terrible, but we're willing to forgive him, provided he comes up with a new game sooner rather than later.

Shopping in Japan

Words and images:
JONTI DAVIES

Shopping for games, much like shopping for music, can involve as much travel and research as you might want to invest. In Japan, which is arguably the most intensely consumerist society in the modern world, it so happens that videogames are deeply rooted in the nation's culture. Games (or terebi gemu, as they are actually referred to) are not as historical as sumo, go, or shogi – but in modern Japan, they are more far more relevant.

Question is, what's out there? And if you were to go to Japan, how many choices would you have as a game shopper? Let's take a trip and make some discoveries. We'll be flying economy class, if you don't mind, to keep more funds left for games, consoles, and little PaRappa plushes. Remember to bring an empty suitcase.

Akihabara

Our first stop, after landing at Narita, is Akihabara. This is Tokyo's slightly freaky-scary electronics ward, where there are at least three maid cafés for every game retailer. (There's plenty of opportunity for relaxation and light S&M, then.) Aki, as its friends know it, is connected to the rest of Tokyo via the Yamanote JR train line – hop on the Yamanote and you can be in the wealthiest, most sophisticated parts of Tokyo (Ginza and Asakusa) within fifteen minutes.

Back in Akihabara, the full range game retailer types are represented. Walking away from the station, the building that dominates your initial field of vision is the recently erected (stop thinking about those maid cafés, they're not that seedy) Yodobashi Camera Akiba electronics store. Yodobashi is a nationwide chain of megastores (for want of a less crappy term) that sell electronics like fish markets sell fish: cheaply, and in huge volumes. The Akiba branch of Yodobashi is an eight-storey building, with cheap restaurants and coffee houses on the ground floor. Other levels are devoted to AV equipment, phones, computers, refrigerators, and washing machines. The seventh floor, though, is the games floor.

The best thing about Yodobashi Camera is its member card, which rewards you with 10% of the sum you've just spent. Points can be accumulated, too, and it's surprisingly easy to collect sufficient points for free games on a regular basis. We'll never say no to a free game. Remarkably, thanks

to the amount of software it manages to sell, Yodobashi also begins by offering a slight price advantage: a PS3 game that sells in most places for Y6,300 will be available at Yodobashi for Y5,900. Factor in the 10% member's discount and it becomes apparent why Japan's largest electronics retailer is able to attract hundreds (sometimes thousands) of gamers at hardware launches. (See "Launch Chaos" boxout.)

Outside of Yodobashi Camera and further away from Akihabara's JR Station towards the neon heart of Aki, independent game shops – some of which are so small that you wonder how they can survive in this jungle – begin to outnumber the large branches of other national retailers, such as Bic Camera, Laox, and Sofmap. Most of these indie stores, we have to assume, manage to get by thanks to their trade in used software. This is a grey area in Japan: a few years ago, there was a lawsuit that attempted to classify the sale of second-hand software as illegal. Thankfully – and quite rightly – it didn't come to pass.

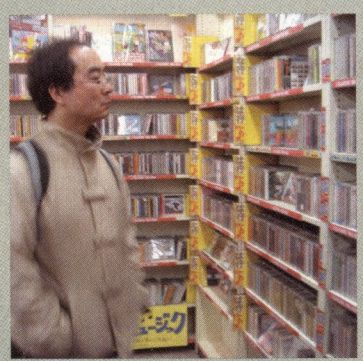
Small game stores in Japan have the same atmosphere as pretty much any other type of local shop here: you'll be greeted with a personal welcome cry: "Irrashaimasse!" This can be a bit disconcerting if you've never been to Japan before. It's shouted with such enthusiasm that you might be shocked, but there's no need to raise your arms and surrender. Just smile and begin to browse some wares.

As you'd expect, prices for used games are set according to the games' age, rarity, and condition. Generally, even where a store has noted that a particular used copy of a game has some defect, marking it as 'average' or 'poor' condition, the game will be in surprisingly good nick. And when a second-hand game is described as being in 'excellent' condition, chances are it will be almost identical to a brand new copy.

This principle also extends to the streets of Japan: citizens here tend not to spit gum on the floor, and they don't drop empty crisp packets. (In fact, they don't even eat crisps in public. No.) It's about respect: respect for one's environment and, in this most important of cases, respect for one's old games.

Some of the used game stores in Akihabara, however, are multi-levelled and cavernous. Although these shops seem to be laid out in a haphazard kind of way and

These steps are making me nauseated



there are boxes everywhere (old console boxes, oversized novelty controller boxes for Densha de GO! and Bemani spin-offs, etc.), everything is clean. And closer inspection reveals that there is order to the chaos: hardware/software formats are kept separate from each other and, although this is a Really Difficult Thing for the katakana-illiterate, games are listed in the order of Japan's kana alphabet.

Of course, if you really cannot find that copy of Rakugaki Showtime you're lusting after, it might pay to ask a member of the shop staff. Contrary to poopular belief, though, most Japanese shop staff cannot speak fluent English. (This is largely a fault of the Japanese education system, which teaches grammar and reading but

fails to provide ample opportunity for conversation.) Your best bet will be to clearly enunciate each syllable of the game you're looking for, and then smile hopefully. Be friendly and you'll receive excellent service, no matter how small your request.

Before leaving Akihabara, it's worth spending some time in the ward's best arcades (such as the Sega Gigaplex on Aki's main High Street) and, depending on your interests, it could also be a good idea to do some retro shopping. If the retro bug has bitten you, Aki has venues to cater for every strain of the virus: there are stores dealing exclusively in arcade PCBs and others that sell retro console/computer games of various vintages. Super Potato is probably the best of Aki's general retro shops, although the Osaka branch of Super Potato (which we'll repeat again, just because it's the world's best name for a game store) is even more impressive, with a greater range of software and hardware. Speaking of Osaka, let's take the Shinkansen (bullet train) to Japan's second city right now. It's a three-hour journey, so we hope you picked up plenty of cheap PSP games in Akihabara.

"Launch Chaos"

Everything you've heard is true. We were in Shinjuku, Tokyo for the PS3 launch last November, for example – and it was chaotic. We arrived at Yodobashi Camera (loyalty reaps great 10% rewards, remember) just after eight in the evening, standing alongside an ever-increasing number of potential PS3 buyers (whose number eventually increased to the extent that traffic couldn't pass through the street) until 10pm.

Just before ten, we were speaking with some clued-up punters about where Yodobashi might decide to form a queue for the hundreds of loiterers – only thanks to a tip-off were we able to get into a strategically sound position and survive the apocalypse (slight hyperbole) that was about to begin. Suddenly, a single Yodobashi staffer raised a placard and a megaphone and said, "Start queuing here, now!"

We understand that's how dictatorships work – one person speaks, thousands listen – but when 2,000 people want a PS3 and one chap dictates how they're going to receive their lovely new systems, we understand why dictatorships always end in misery. We managed to get to 64th in the queue, though, and for that we're proud to say that we survived last year's Tokyo "launch chaos".

Den Den Town

Mainland Japan has two main districts. Kanto is the region that takes in Tokyo, Chiba, Yokohama, and other prefectures in the east of Japan's main Honshu island; Kansai, over to the west of Honshu, includes Osaka, Kobe, Nara, and Kyoto. There's been a great rivalry between these two districts for as long as anyone can remember, and the capital of Japan was Nara, then Kyoto, and only officially moved to Tokyo in 1869. Traditionally, though, Osaka is regarded as the commercial capital of Japan.

Den Den Town, aka Electric Town aka Nipponbashi, is Osaka's answer to Akihabara. It doesn't have the intensity of Aki's streets, where shops seem to have been piled on top of each other in a drunken game of Sim City, but as a result it's much easier to get around Den Den Town. Access to Den Den Town is by the underground (chikatetsu) from Osaka's central JR Station, and it's partly thanks to the absence of over-ground train lines/bridges that Nipponbashi is an easily navigable grid of streets. It's a big grid, no mistake, but you shouldn't get lost (too often).

There isn't a Yodobashi Camera in Den Den Town (Osaka's branch is in the city's central Umeda ward), but there are alternatives such as Bic Camera. Really, though, if you've come all the way to Den Den Town, it doesn't make sense to shop at a chain store that could be visited anywhere else in Japan. Den Den has its specialist shops, and it's for their sake we've just blown the equivalent of AU$250 on a bullet train ticket.

First, there is Big Tiger. This is found on Den Den Town's main game shop street, a few doors away from a Mister Donut café (recommended donut: pon de lion). Big Tiger looks more like a skinny cat from outside, but its interior is in actuality Big. It's also packed with new and used games and hardware for all formats, with used prices that are cheaper than most of its competitors. We bought two sets of Sega-made maracas in Big Tiger, for use with Dreamcast classic Samba De Amigo (and its sequel), at Y4,500 per set. Cheap. They're like new, too. (Search eBay to see how much of a bargain our maracas are.)

The real reason to visit Den Den Town, though, is Super Potato 7. It is related to the Super Potato retro shop in Akihabara but, as its name suggests, this Osaka version is roughly seven times superior. Like many indie/retro shops in Japan, Super Potato 7 has a section of its floor space set aside for game soundtracks, but this is the ultimate: two walls full of classic game soundtracks on CD. There's another wall full of MSX games, many of which were developed and published by Sony. Better still, Super Potato 7 has an in-store drink machine, so you can continue browsing while quaffing some lemonade.

With three floors to explore and more game-related paraphernalia than we knew to exist, this is the perfect example of nostalgic game commerce. There are, however, plenty of other ways to buy games in Japan. It doesn't all involve potatoes and tigers and proximity to dodgy establishments.

Best. Potato. Ever.

No Games, No Life

Tower Records, in spite of suffering a complete collapse in the West, is still going strong in Japan. Perhaps it has something to do with the Japanese stores' bold slogan: "No music, no life."

In Japan, anything that is being sold is promoted with great enthusiasm. There's zero lethargy in Japanese business. That's why you'll see "GAME" written in huge katakana type on the front of any shop that stocks games. It's a particularly common sight on the facades of so-called 'recycle stores', which deal in used books, DVDs, CDs, and games. These warehouse-type outlets are usually found in the suburbs of towns and cities — they're very popular shopping destinations for families-with-kids, where parents can trade in anything their children have tired of, and pick up some 'new' bargains at the same time. One of the most successful recycle stores in Japan is called Book Off — please supply your own gags.

Elsewhere, especially in the past few years, shopping for games online has become popular in Japan. (Previously, the relatively low penetration of credit cards — not Internet access — had kept online transaction in Japan at a minimum.) Yodobashi Camera and its rivals all have online stores although, unfortunately for would-be importers, most of them refuse to ship games outside of Japan.

While eBay reigns supreme in the West, Japan is devoted to Yahoo! Auctions. Again, most sellers — for whatever reason — state that they will not ship internationally. Besides, the sign-up process for Yahoo! Auctions are virtually impossible without the ability to read Japanese and, as is the norm here, local bank transfers through the ATMs of domestic Japanese banks conclude most transactions. In short, don't bother.

If you just fancy picking up a game with your bread and milk, though, Japan has you sorted. Convenience stores (conbini), alongside post offices and pachinko parlours, are the institutions that keep Japan ticking along so very nicely. The main conbini players are Lawson, FamilyMart, 7-11, and AMPM — all of them sell games, as well as limited selections of movies and albums. More bizarrely, console hardware is also on sale in some conbinis. So that'll be two cans of Asahi, a loaf of bread, a pint of Megmilk, and a 60GB PlayStation3. Please. <<

No buddy, you book off! Get out of my booking face you mother booker!

MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:
78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW
2016 Australia

EMAIL:
freakscene@next.com.au

LETTER OF THE MONTH!

The T-Shirt of Mystery - it's like a mithril shirt for real geeks, not pervy Hobbit fanciers, protecting you from the blows and barbs of the unwashed masses.

★★Letter of the Month!★★
THREE RED LIGHTS

Cast your minds back about two years ago before the Xbox 360 was released and hyper had mentioned (I forget which issue and article it was in) a rumour that one year after the xbox360 is released, there may be a secret feature unlocked, perhaps full backwards-compatibility, etc. Now, being just a rumour, it was never heard from again. Until now.

I have discovered the 'secret' that is unlocked in your beloved Xbox 360 console after its first twelve months of booting up: THE THREE RED LIGHTS OF DEATH!! That's right, your console dies! You get up one day to play Oblivion and WHAMMY! It hits you like B.O. on a PC gamer. You get the error message, the 3 flashing red lights on your console and... well. nothing else. DEAD. Thats right, you were there at midnight, you got your pre-ordered console, you took it home, it over heated, if froze up, you returned it, got another one and 13 months later it is screwed again. Some of you are probably thinking this is just an isolated incident right? Wrong!

Just look up any Xbox forum on the net to hear about peoples consoles screwing up after the 13 month period. I spoke to a console repair business in Brisbane and apparently they're getting 10 Xbox 360 consoles with this problem EVERY week! So you say, just send it away to get it fixed. That's fine, but Mr Pakistan from the Microsoft support line wanted my credit card details given over the phone to pay for the $199 fee so that my console can be repaired (there's 3 more red lights of death – giving credit card details to someone from another country over the phone). Anyway, my rant is over.

Screw you Microsoft. Your console sucks anus. This is my 2nd faulty Xbox 360 in 14 months and quite frankly, I've had enough. It seems that Microsoft don't care about anybody or anything, Just getting their product out before the competition. That's all that matters. Not you or I.

Concrete Donkey

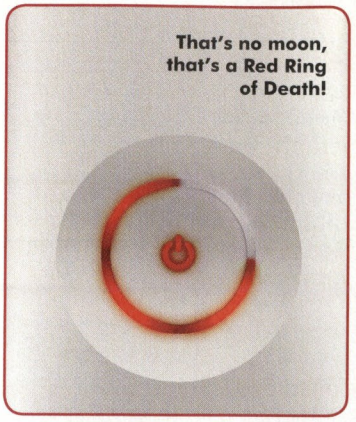
Thankfully, the Hyper team have thus far managed to avoid getting the three red lights of death, but we do know people who haven't been so lucky, so we can at least partially appreciate how it must feel to have two defective consoles in such a short period of time.

The three red lights predicament is a difficult case to approach though. On the one hand, Microsoft are still maintaining that very few Xbox 360s are returned to them for repairs, and while it is safe to say that the majority of Xbox 360 consoles work perfectly, and probably will do so into the future, there are far too many reports coming in from consumers who have experienced system failure for it to be mere coincidence.

A brief browse on the Internet uncovers countless consumer complaints and stories of call-centre woe. But that is also the nature of the internet – people only jump on an anonymous public forum to complain, not to praise.

Apparently, the majority of the three red lights cases have occurred mostly in early-model X360's. The theory is that on some models the internal heat of the console can de-solder some electrical connections within the console's circuitry – causing complete system failure.

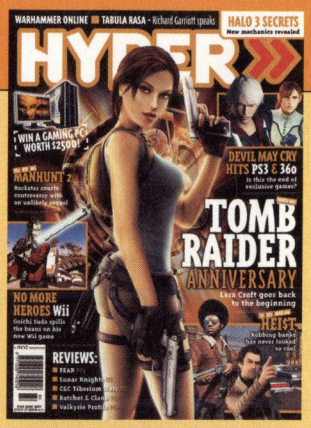
Some people have discovered a few bizarre, and potentially dangerous, remedies for this problem (like running your X360 under a hamper load of towels, to super-heat your console and re-connect the solder), but we absolutely do not recommend trying any of them out.



CAPTION THIS!

MICHAEL PINCOTT showed us true musical talent with this little bit of artistry.

When James Blunt realised he had no talent he established a new carreer as a hobo



HYPER 164 FEEDBACK

That sweet, sweet feedback keeps on piling up – and it looks like last month's issue was exactly what you needed. Remember though, we need your feedback to know how good, or otherwise, Hyper is treating you – so keep on hitting that "post" button over at *www.hyperactive.com.au*

Squato

The article on ingame advertising was a big help in my marketing class. It is rare to find anything of worth that talks about how online marketing (even ingame) is impacting Australians since most of those reports either talk about Google or just Americocentric in general.

Iothar1

Just read Dan Staines' "So you want to be a Games Journo" and I've gotta say - spot on!

Freelance work is definitely something that needs to be done alongside something that actually earns you money. And the line about promo versions of games speaks to me so strongly as I gaze over my shelf containing un-sellable games that I'll probably never play ever again.

Games5522

I really enjoyed the "Top 10 [mostly useless] Gadgets we still wish we had" feature. I want that laser keyboard and that funny Yoda backpack. The backpack would be even funnier if it said random quotes from Star Wars.

El nombre

Why are the reviews so short? There was only 11 reviews in this issue and yet there was only 1 review with 2 pages... At least a couple more reviews with some more pages please. 1 page doesn't do some games justice...

There is some speculation that the new "Elite" model Xbox 360's cooler-running internals protect it from the problem.

In the end the only good thing that Microsoft could do about the problem would be to waive the $199 fee for red-ringed customers, but as we know, that's quite unlikely to happen.

PS3 IS WORTH $1000

I know Hyper readers tend to be slightly more educated than the average Internet forum poster, but I still need to say this here, as I almost certainly will get flamed if I post my argument on online. The PS3 is worth $1000. Perhaps I should say that I'm 13, earn $9 a week for chores, plus the occasional bonus for random things, and bought an Xbox last generation. Oh, and the PS3 was payed for entirely by myself. I saved for two years.

For those of you who are quick to judge, and think I'm idiot for not buying a 360, you may be right. So what? Just because the 360 is cheaper, and is basically the same in almost every way, except for the price tag, doesn't suddenly make the PS3 worthless. I really don't think much of the almost political way games consoles (In fact, games themselves), are compared to each other. I had a DS, found it boring, sold it and got a PSP. That doesn't mean I've suddenly turned on my life long friends and completely destroyed Nintendo's hopes for winning the handheld "war". So why is everyone so incredibly pissed at the PS3's perfectly reasonable price tag. Blu-ray players are expensive, good graphics are expensive, good games are expensive, and people need to make a living. If that means that one console is two and a half times more expensive than another, then oh well. C'est la vie.

Dennis

We can't speak for everyone Dennis, but we're not "incredibly pissed at the PS3's reasonable pricetag", we're just disgruntled at the incredibly unreasonable markup that the Australian PlayStation 3 has received.

Taking a look at the price tags around the world, you'll be hard pressed to find a region that pays more for the PS3 than the PAL regions (Australia, New Zealand and Europe).

In the United States a PlayStation 3 costs US$599, roughly equating to about 730 Australian dollars, while in it's native Japan the machine costs ¥59,980, approximately 600 Australian dollars.

Now, in the past Australia has always paid marginally more for electronics than the rest of the world, but forgive us if we believe a mark-up of almost $300 over the American price, and a 40% hike over the Japanese price is a little excessive.

Sony themselves must surely recognise that the PS3 is selling at an unenviable price point, something that is probably more to blame than anything else for the console's trailing sale rates behind those of the Xbox 360 and Wii. If the console were more in line with the prices paid in the rest of the world, perhaps the gap would be much tighter.

However, the fact remains that if you're an early adopter who wants to get into Blu-Ray video and also be set up for the next generation of gaming, then the PS3 does give you far better value for money than buying a stand-alone Blu-Ray player and a separate gaming console. However, if you're not ready for Blu-Ray video yet, either because you haven't worn out your DVD collection, or if you're already betrothed to HD-DVD, then the extra cost could be seen as dead money.

Either way, we just wish that we weren't the region bearing the brunt of the cost.

WHAAAAAAT?

So anyway I read your article "Sonic The Hedgehog, The Rise and Fall." Now I am a mere boy of 14, my first console was a N64 and the first Sonic game I had ever played was "Sonic Adventure 2: Battle" for Gamecube. This was my first taste of a Sonic game, and I liked it.

One day I spied a copy of Sonic Mega Collection at my local EB, I thought seeing as I had never played the original Sonic games that I'd get it to see what they were like. When I got home I put the disc into my Gamecube and started playing, I played them all for a fair amount of time, enough time to decide on whether on not I liked them. Well yes I did enjoy them but I enjoyed the 3D ones better, now I bet some of you are thinking something along the lines of "WHAAAAAAT?" and the answer is simple – I was used to the gameplay of the 3D ones and they were the ones on which my liking for Sonic games were formed.

Perhaps if I had played the old ones first maybe I would be just like the majority an think they were the better ones, but I'm not. Now this got me thinking about games that came out in my day, say Pikmin. What if a game like Pikmin went through a stage like Sonic and it changed it's gameplay a bit and turned it into something that the fans of the series deemed "bad" but really it may not be a bad game but more a "different" game.

I will also like to add to this point that I have not yet played Sonic for 360 or PS3, and that may actually be a bad game, but I did think that Sonic Heroes was interesting but still even compared to the two Sonic Adventure game's was not that great, so don't say anything like "well you haven't played the new one!".

Zach Clarke

We can certainly understand that if the first Sonic game you were introduced to was the three-dimensional Sonic Adventure, then you may prefer the newer Sonics to the older, more primitive, games in the series.

We can't really agree that the Sonic series has aged like a fine wine though. The fact is that since that after the three games that are generally agreed to be the best in the series, Sonic 1, Sonic 2 and Sonic CD, each successive instalment has been worse than the last. The original Sonic Adventure on Dreamcast was somewhat of an exception, as it was as close to the fast and frantic fun that the first few Sonic games had. Unfortunately Sonic team just haven't upheld their momentum,

hotseat

It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month int he Hot Seat sits the collective arse of Juice Games, developers of the street racing sequel, Juiced 2 for Xbox 360, PS3, PS2, PSP, PC and DS. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to Juice Games. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

Questions can be sent to: hotseat@next.com.au

Questions can be posted in the Hot Seat area of the Hyperactive forums http://forums.hyperactive.com.au/

NiB
Some very interesting thoughts about the Manhunt sequel being a diversion from Rockstar. It makes you wonder what lengths they would be willing to do to take some heat from their flagship franchise.

Gutsman Heavy
Needs a Billy Dee Williams poster.

the_watchers_eye
Reading Dan's column "Expectations and Other Disappointments", I had no idea that you guys received hate mail for your review scores. What sort of a sick person gets that worked up over a game?

Australian Ninja
I really enjoyed the article about gaming related injuries. "Nintendo Thumb" got a loud laugh from me as soon as I read that title. I can remember getting genuine blisters and calluses from playing too much vigorous street fighter on mega drive and SNES back in the day.

Mr_M
That Engrish Get! article was hilarious, but it should have mentioned Donkey Kong- his NAME is Engrish!

with successive Sonic releases getting bogged down in superfluous characters, crummy level design, shoddy controls and even more dastardly crimes against gameplay.

As for saying "well you haven't played the new one!" – well, you haven't, have you. Had you attempted to enjoy the Xbox 360 or PS3 version you would probably have to concede, as we did, that the Sonic franchise needs a massive overhaul before it can approach the greatness that it once had.

I ♥ ZOMBIES & SHOPPING

Greetings to my favourite magazine from a small township that we locals like to call "Mildura". My letter concerns those chaperones of shambling, the masters of moaning, the... well it's about zombies anyway. Having been a long time fan of the zombie, (not just in gaming) it was your article on these under-rated heroes in last month's issue that got me thinking. I totally agree with what Dylan had to say on the entire subject of zombies, right from their unnaturally good ability to be killed in so many different (and hilarious) ways, to their just as good ability to scare so much crap out of you that you struggle to sleep at night knowing the game is still sitting in your console or installed on your computer.

To me, I see them as the perfect enemy. In small numbers, they are mere cannon fodder, which is a good way to implement a learning curve into a game without it being too obvious (for example the elevator in Dead Rising which starts off empty, and completely bloodless, before the zombies work out how to push buttons). In larger numbers, however, they are a force to be reckoned with, and can overpower you with relative ease should you become careless or lazy at the mall. The meat and two veg of this letter is my concern over how the poor zombies abilities are being whored out over so many different games, and most of them not in a good way.

When I first purchased my 360, there was but one game I wanted, and that was the absolutely brilliant Dead Rising. The people at Capcom have gone close (in my opinion) to a damn near perfect game. I'm sure many will moan (pun intended) at this point about how something in the game wasn't quite right but I'm looking at it from an overall view.

The zombies in Dead Rising are exactly how zombies should be represented in video games, meaning there are many of them, they have no teamwork and they can die in many funny, funny ways (post digger anyone?) but still can devour you so easily it isn't funny (unlike the post digger). The problem is that it seems many game developers use zombies as an enemy simply because there is little work involved to use them. All they have to do is program some lazy AI into them, perhaps give them a weapon of some description to make it just that little bit harder to beat and there you go, that's another hour of the game you don't have to worry about as far as storyline goes.

The two main examples of this that come to mind are Halo and Far Cry. Whilst Halo is a fantastic game (as everyone already knows) I found that the zombie (flood) sections of the game were the most tedious and uninteresting of the game. I cant help but think that it would have been better if the Flood were less, well, zombie-ish and incorporated the same intelligence that the rest of the game had in terms of varying enemies and environment Far Cry is in the same boat, I mean, fair enough they were doing experiments on the island, but zombies? Come on. All in all, what I want is to see the zombies and their true colours given the respect they deserve and not just used to plug holes in storyline and gameplay.

Someone has to stand up for zombie rights because lets face it, they sure as hell can't do it themselves. And remember, in a zombie invasion, there is no such thing as a safe hiding place, only safer...

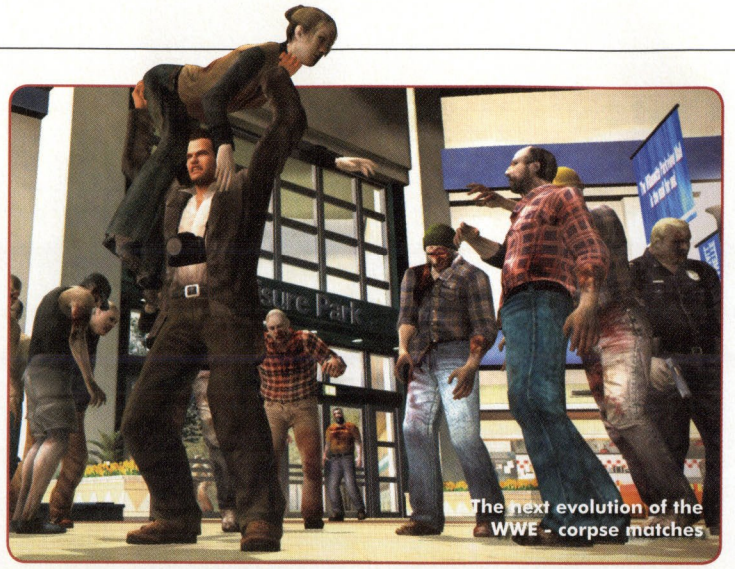
Eskimo Sammy Joe

We never thought we'd hear ourselves say it, but you are right – there are just some games where a zombie doesn't belong.

There are plenty of games that misuse the zombie as a quick and easy enemy, and if simply look through this month's reviews you'll find one that doesn't quite get it right.

We agree too that even high-profile games can misuse zombies. Halo's flood zombies, were cool the first time they appeared, but their mindlessness when compared to the intelligent Covenant enemies did become a little grating after you'd dispatched your millionth flood zombie. Wilks in particular has a burning hatred for the flood and has all his fingers crossed that they don't reappear in Halo 3.

If anything, Dead Rising has opened all of our eyes to how good a zombie game should be, and how real zombie enemies should behave. Sure, the fact that it was heavily influenced by one of our favourite films of all time (George Romero's Dawn of the Dead) helped it win some hearts too, but in the end it was the game's perfect implementation of the zombie as harmless when alone, but deadly when in packs that really had us hooked. Something we wish more games could take more notice of...



The next evolution of the WWE - corpse matches

UNREAL BOOKS

I was wondering, in issue #163 of Hyper you interviewed Susan O'Connor the scriptwriter of Gears of War. I would like to know if it is possible to buy that book and the others in the previous pages like Half Life 2 and System Shock. If you could get back to me it would be appreciated very much thank you.

Aaron Clayton.

We've been getting a lot of inquiries about those books, Aaron, but I'm afraid I've got some shocking news for you, and every one else that has been asking us where they can buy them.

Simply put, the books do not exist. They were created by our resident designer, Malcolm Campbell, as a way to illustrate the idea of story in games. Obviously, he did too good a job on them!

We'd love to be able to say that all of the books that decorated our Bending Pages feature were real and available to buy through Distinguished Octopus Press, but unfortunately, you'll just have to settle for watching the story unfold as you play the actual games.

DEAR HYPER,

I've noticed a rather worrying trend in gaming. The advances in gaming hardware have allowed for gaming to be less of a solitary pursuit, but also produced some less desirable effects. Multiplayer is becoming bigger and bigger, and I fear it will continue to be at the expense of single player games.

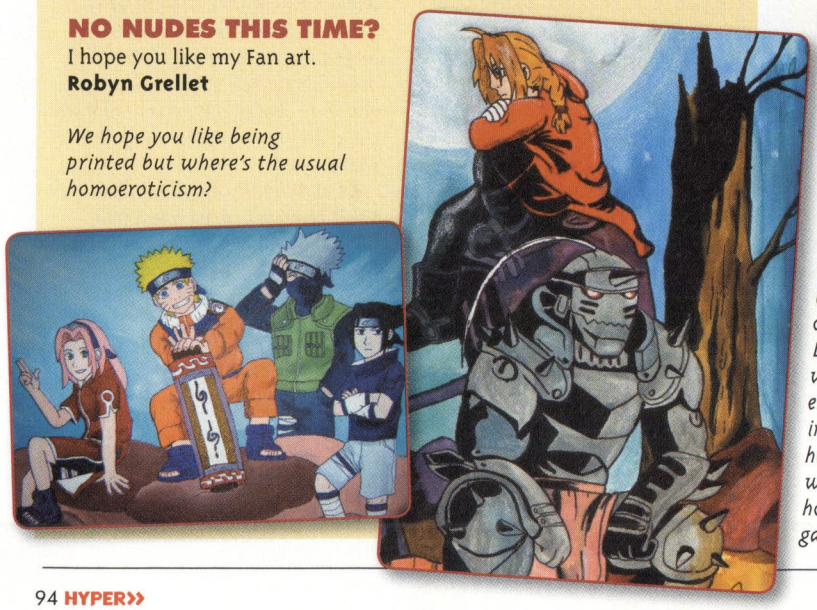
There's no doubt multiplayer is huge. Multiplayer only games, in the fledgling stage ten years ago, are firmly entrenched in the market. They seem to be alternate lives for some people – the tedium of constant levelling in MMORPG is presumably like a job. Gamers seem to be shedding the un-sociable stigma and realising it's good to play together, aided in no small

NO NUDES THIS TIME?

I hope you like my Fan art.

Robyn Grellet

We hope you like being printed but where's the usual homoeroticism?



FORUM

Manny_M
Have you ever bought a game for a console that you didn't own yet?
I know I have. I brought Kuru Kuru Kururin on GBA for $20, it was 6 months later that I finally got a GBA. I brought FFX for $25 and it was 4 months later that I got a PS2. I got Power Stone on DC about 2 months ago and haven't played it yet becaue I dont have a DC.

craptest
Zelda 2 on Wii. I say make it Cel shaded
Id love to see ZELDA return to the Cel shaded look of Wind Waker. It's a look that will remain somewhat timeless. They could easily take it in a far more mature direction (look at the use of Cel Shading in Killer 7). What does everyone else think of this?

lostturtle
Zelda 2 on Wii. I say make it Cel shaded
I think the next Zelda game should be rendered in whatever fashion suits it best. I really think last gen's cel-shading came as a result of the original concept of the game, not Nintendo just deciding they wanted it that way from day one. I mean half the game's on this vast ocean with equal parts violent storms and sunshine. I doubt half the atmosphere of these scenes would have been captured if it wasn't cel shaded.

I'd just rather whatever type of story or original gameplay elements Ninty come up with for the next Zelda game is represented in their visual design.

HiredMan
The PlayStation 3 Thread – Out Now!
Korea gets a new 80gb PS3 for 518,000 Won. This translates to $678.92AUD.

Can someone explain to me why we pay almost 1/3 more for an inferior machine? I know this has been discussed before but I must've missed something. This is a shafting of colossal proportions...

Quatters
The PlayStation 3 Thread – Out Now!
For some reason, they've decided that all PAL region machines need to be priced much higher. In Europe they pay as much as we do for PS3s. As for a logical reason... There is none.

pauljdavidson
The 360 Marketplace Announcement Thread
Well it seems microsoft have finally moved to stamp out fake overseas accounts. I keep getting an error message "This item is not available from your location" as of this morning. Dammit.

Turb06
The 360 Marketplace Announcement Thread
I dont see what the big deal is over creating overseas accounts, how else are the people that are into jap games going to be able to demo them before they by (if they can) i think having a global content section of live is a must.

Starscream
The Official Nintendo DS Thread
Before you go crazy with the stylus and touch screen, buy some screen protectors! Best $10 investment you will make. Ouendan/Elite Beat Agents will prove it!

Me
The Official Nintendo DS Thread
That's only really the spinners though I've found, mine came away unscathed from Ouendan and beating all difficulties (and subsequently going back through and full comboing the hardest diff) so I guess if you're careful enough and don't hammer down on the touch screen you'll be fine, much like any game I guess.

JubeiSaotome
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops
Just got this game in the mail. Single Player is comprised of short quick missions. Great for on the go play. Recruiting via Wi-Fi is fun too, walking around my block at 8:30pm, I recruited 4 new soldiers.

Network mode is awesome, I played a US friend over Wi-Fi and considering the distance, there was practically NO LAG. I'll see myself enjoying this.

Cranky
The Sega Dreamcast Appreciation Thread
Thank god for my DC. My 360 just died (disk reading thingy) for the second time and I was unable to do a straight swap this time. I had to send it to M$. I almost think it was a good thing to happen as I hooked my DC up to my gaming monitor and got into some Under Defeat action tate style.

Best shmup of all time I reckon.

part by the boom in MMORPGs, non-games and Nintendo's new hardware. Now almost every game has a multiplayer mode.

The nature of multiplayer must surely make it a lot easier to develop. There's no story, no AI, no video and almost every aspect of design is easier; there's really just a need to ensure balance, and allow the gamers to make the fun themselves so they play for hours on end. It's a lot of fun playing with mates and indulging in liberal amounts of smack talk and alcohol, but all that is stripped out only serves to make these games shallow. If it comes down to it, how many multiplayer games are remembered as truly great? Heck, how many games with multiplayer modes are remembered as great? Popular and often brilliant yes, but great? It's the lack of real depth and an indescribable X-factor that condemns these games to eventual obscurity. Ultimately we remember classics like Zelda, Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid, Resident Evil, etc, that feature almost purely single player. Time is more favourable to single player games. If you can't play a multi player game with anyone, does it still exist?

Depsite that, multiplayer is such a worry, because of its increased influence on game development. With so many games having multiplayer modes, then multiplayer changes from being a bonus extra to a crutch. When given a choice of 50+ hours of easy to produce multiplayer against extending a well constructed 10-hour quest to even 15-hours, how many developers would take the single player path? Metroid Prime is probably the only FPS in 5 years to do so. And how many games are redeemed or at least improved by multiplayer modes? Where multiplayer modes are exactly like single player, the inadequacies of single player like poor AI or balance tend to even out, which can be a great benefit. But still, a poor, under-cooked single player mode in the first place is a complete disappointment.

I'm not here to completely dump on multiplayer though, but I'd consider myself old fashioned in preferring single player. I recognise the value of multiplayer, particularly in enhancing and greatly lengthening incredible experiences, but if it means weak single player (Halo 2, anyone?), it's not so good. At least on Wii and DS, which have most of the franchises dating from the 80s, there are plenty of games that could or do stand well with only single player modes. But still, despite the talk in Hyper's pages, and hopefully elsewhere, of a wish for greater depth and innovation in gaming, could the trend continue and single player slide in to obscurity?

Al Christie

We like single-player experiences too Al, but we do have to disagree with you on a couple of points there.

For starters, the conception that multiplayer-only games are easier to developer than single-player games, and therefore the lazy option when it comes to game development is somewhat of a fallacy. Take MMORPGs for example. Your average MMORPG take five years of development with a full team of staff, and millions upon millions of dollars to take from concept to reality. Even after the game is completed the developer must constantly work on the game, building new content and monitoring player activity, which again, cost money, time and man hours to accomplish.

Even if you're not making an MMO, and are instead developing a typical online multiplayer shooter, like the Battlefeild series, there are still considerable development hurdles to overcome. As well as building a game that is balanced and fun, you also have to keep it running with as many as 64 players logging in from around the world, each with their own hardware configuration and network speed. That's a tough task.

Compare that to a typical single-player game, which may be developed over perhaps two years, and once it leaves the developers hands, barring any unforseen problems that need to be patched, they can stop working on it and move on to something new. Who would you say was getting the easier deal out of those two options?

Another point we'd contest is that games with multiplayer modes won't be remembered as being great. Sure, Zelda, Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid and Resident Evil are great games, but by your logic does that make Street Fighter 2, GoldenEye 007, Halo, Mario Kart or even Tetris not great games? Since all of those games have multiplayer modes.

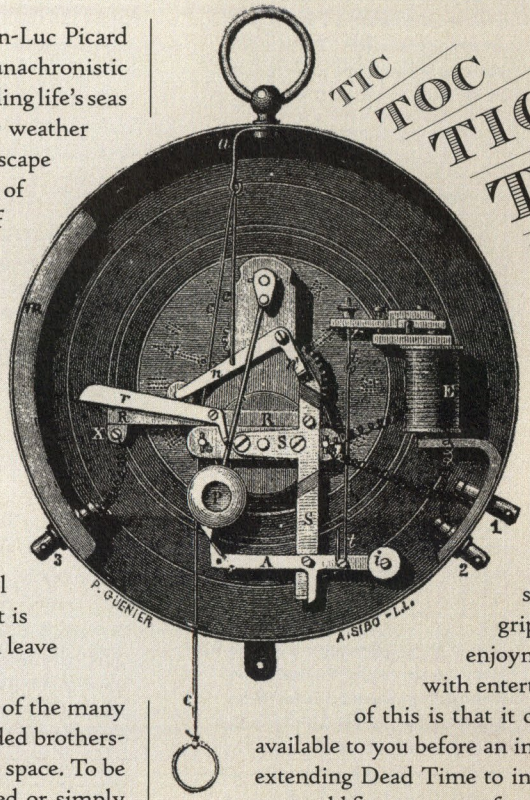
In the end multiplayer is just another tool in the game developers' toolbox. It can add almost unlimited replayability to an already great single-player game, and it can be great in its own right. Occasionally it can even save a game with a bad single player experience from being complete trash.

We're always holding out for more depth and innovation in gaming in the future, but the truth is that multiplayer will inevitably be a part of the future.

The Passion of the Gamer

Dead Time

By Dylan Burns



Father Time is a cruel mistress

TIC TOC TIC TOC TIC TOC

Life's a funny thing. One moment you're doing Jean-Luc Picard impersonations and the next you're lamenting the anachronistic mood of said impersonation. One moment you're sailing life's seas in calm weather and the next you're embroiled in stormy weather and roiling seas the likes of which it feels you'll never escape from; and strange thing is that whenever these moments of tension or crisis arrive time itself has a nefarious way of making the storms feel like they're lasting a lot longer than they really are. Like elastic bands, they're stretched out to their limit and you're forced to face these rough seas with determination and equanimity.

Of course, my opening analogy is somewhat melodramatic when applied to my own existence, for I can safely say that my personal moments of dark weather and sea sickness are relatively trivial when compared to those experienced by other, less fortunate souls. But that's the great thing about perspective; it makes everything that happens to you seem more earth-shattering than it really is. A paper cut can seem as painful as losing a limb in a freak photocopying accident, and so it is that the seemingly trivial things that taint our passions can leave their mark upon us long after their occurrence.

The life of a Gameboffin has as its purpose the analysis of the many crises that impact upon game time, and to enlist like-minded brothers-in-play to push forward into the unknown reaches of game space. To be the explorers of subjects that most gamers take for granted or simply turn away from in fear. This month, the problem is Dead Time, and before we can tackle this dip in the ocean of life, we must first define it. Dead Time is a hard thing to explain so it is perhaps best presented through a few descriptive examples of its occurrence.

Example 1 – Work: Dead Time happens when you're at work... well, unless you play games for a living (despite being a Gameboffin I still have to earn a few measly dollars by selling out to The Man). When at work, you aren't playing games, it's as simple as that. This time is Dead Time; it's time that could be better spent in front of the television or PC grinning like an idiot and getting into 'the zone'.

Example 2 – Loved One Indenture: Spending time with the girlfriend (or insert family member/loved one here) is Dead Time. You're not getting any bonus points, you're not racking up kills or pwning noobs, and you're definitely not downing sugary drinks and laughing at some Yank's gamertag. Besides, that special somebody should know by now that your real love is for games. Who the hell wants to watch Grey's Anatomy when you could be rappelling through city streets and fighting crime? Who wants to go shopping when all you end up being is a glorified list holder? Those are lost gaming hours darn it.

Example 3 – Impending Doom: Okay, this here is the Dead Time I'm talking about, and it's the most insidious incarnation of this problem. It's when you know that you have to go somewhere/do something/be with somebody (most commonly work) that Dead Time reaches out with its dark tendrils and grips your heart with icy coldness.

At first, knowing that you've got four hours before you need to do anything seems like an awesome thing, late start FTW! However, something strange then happens to your psyche. The knowledge of that impending doom hangs over your head like a giant wave, making you feel small and helpless in its wake. You can't stop it, it's going to happen and there's no way that you can shake the feeling that perhaps you should start getting ready, start preparing yourself for the long separation.

Like cancer, this knowledge spreads throughout your ego, gripping the part responsible for enjoyment and poisoning your interaction with entertainment devices. The worst effect of this is that it completely taints any and all time available to you before an impending appointment, effectively extending Dead Time to include the whole bloody day. Sure, you could fire up a game for a half hour or so, but the enjoyment that you get from this is nothing compared to a lazy weekend when you've got nothing important to do. The future presses upon the present like a zombie horde assaulting a house full of juicy plebs.

Sometimes you may be able to trick yourself into believing that you actually don't have to be anywhere in an hour. "Heh, what an awesome day," you say with melodramatic panache. "Nothing to do whatsoever... I DO NOT have to be anywhere else, so hey I can play games for hours and hours!" As if simply saying so can trick your brain into relaxing and shift its focus from the dread of having to leave the house. I've been there and unfortunately it rarely works. All that happens is you end up pacing the house and developing some kind of weird split personality, mumbling to yourself, scratching imaginary itches and acquiescing to your sudden craving for Tiny Teddies.

Perhaps you've never experienced Dead Time, or if you have you've never recognised it as such. I apologise if my investigation into gamers' problems has this effect on you, opening your eyes to problems you never knew you had. Oftentimes I attempt to offer advice or cures for the described ailment(s) and all is made right by the end of my monthly parchment.

Sadly, in this case, I have no such easy fix, no tonic to sooth the soul or ease your troubled mind. Dead Time is a cancer to our game enjoyment time and one that we brothers-in-play are at war with. Arm yourselves brothers, with the only weapons able to even slightly affect this ravaging beast. Namely: new titles, a nonchalant attitude, phoned-in sick days, enthusiastic game sessions, and the general dislocation of your social conscience. Do so and you may just be successful at keeping Dead Time at bay. Or, as Jean-Luc would say, "Make it so."

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THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	God Of War 2	Action
2	▲	Singstar Rocks! Bundle	Family
3	▲	Singstar Legends Bundle	Family
4	▲	Guitar Hero 2 Bundle	Family
5	▼	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle	Action
6	▲	FIFA 2007	Sports
7	▲	Ricky Ponting Cricket 2007	Sports
8	▲	Final Fantasy XII	RPG
9	▲	Eyetoy Sports Bundle	Compilation
10	▲	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Diddy Kong Racing	Racing
2	▲	Final Fantasy III	RPG
3	◆	Nintendogs Dalmation	Simulator
4	◆	Nintendogs Lab	Simulator
5	▲	Big Brain Academy	Family
6	▲	Spiderman 3	Adventure
7	◆	The Sims 2: Pets	Strategy
8	◆	Animal Crossing Wild World	Strategy
9	▲	New Super Mario Bros	Adventure
10	▲	Nintendogs Dachschund	Simulator

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Zelda Twilight Princess	RPG
2	▲	Spiderman 3	Adventure
3	▲	Dragonball Z Tenkaichi 2	Action
4	▼	Warioware Smooth Moves	Family
5	▼	Sonic And The Secret Rings	Adventure
6	◆	Red Steel	Action
7	▲	Rayman Raving Rabbids	Adventure
8	▲	Tiger Woods PGA 2007 Tour	Sports
9	▼	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
10	▼	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle	Action

TOP 10 Playstation 3 Games Over $60

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Resistance: Fall Of Man	Action
2	◆	Motorstorm	Racing
3	▼	Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion	Rpg
4	◆	Fear	Action
5	▲	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
6	▼	Formula One Champ Edition	Racing
7	▲	Fight Night Round 3	Action
8	▼	Call Of Duty 3	Action
9	▲	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007	Sports
10	▼	NBA 2K7	Sports

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	World Of Warcraft	RPG
2	◆	C & C 3 Tiberium Wars	Strategy
3	▲	LOTR: Shadows Of Angmar	RPG
4	◆	Sims 2: Seasons	Strategy
5	▼	WoW: Burning Crusade	RPG
6	◆	Sims 2: Pets	Strategy
7	◆	Sims 2: Celebration Stuff	Strategy
8	▲	Sims 2: Nightlife	Strategy
9	▲	Sims 2: Open For Business	Strategy
10	▲	Sims 2 Glamour Life Stuff	Strategy

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Spiderman 3	Adventure
2	◆	Guitar Hero 2 Bundle	Family
3	▲	Fear	Action
4	▲	Crackdown	Action
5	▼	Fight Night Round 3	Sports
6	▼	Gears Of War	Action
7	◆	Saints Row	Adventure
8	◆	Ghost Recon Advanced 2	Action
9	▲	FIFA 2007	Sports
10	▲	Lost Planet	Action

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	God Of War 2	PlayStation 2
2	▲	Spiderman 3	Xbox 360
3	▲	Diddy Kong Racing	Nintendo DS
4	▲	World Of Warcraft	PC/MAC
5	▲	Singstar Rocks! Bundle	PlayStation 2
6	▲	C & C 3: Tiberium Wars	PC/MAC
7	▲	Singstar Legends Bundle	PlayStation 2
8	▲	Resistance: Fall Of Man	PlayStation 3
9	▲	LOTR Shadows Of Angmar	PC/MAC
10	▲	The Sims 2: Seasons	PC/MAC

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 13th May 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: Vice City Stories	Adventure
2	▲	Daxter Ptm	Adventure
3	▲	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Adventure
4	▲	Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	RPG
5	▼	Call Of Duty Road To Victory	Action
6	▼	Prince Of Persia Rival Swords	Adventure
7	▼	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle	Action
8	▲	Sega Mega Drive Collection	Action
9	▼	WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 07	Sports
10	▼	Tekken Dark Resurection	Action

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

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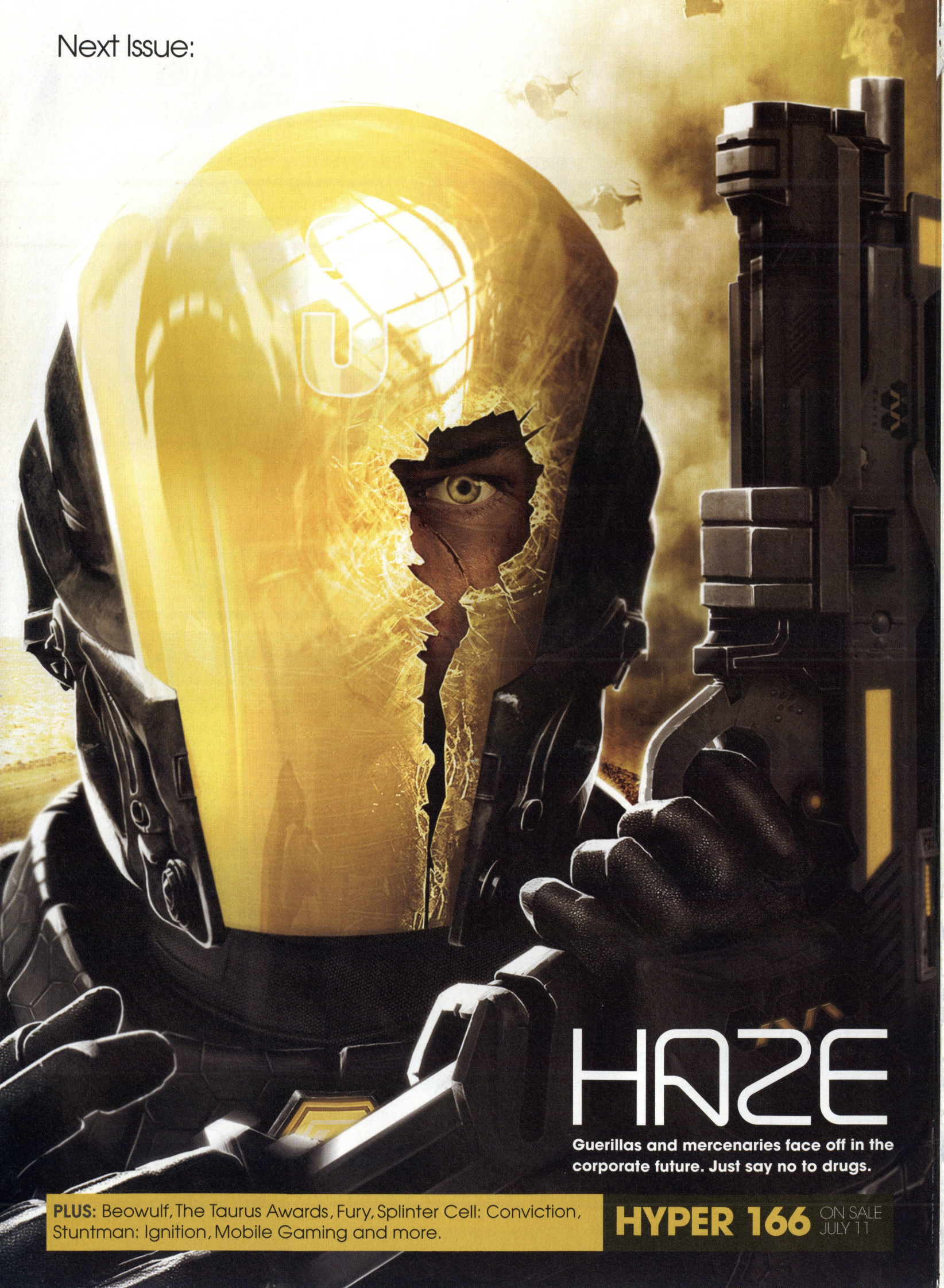

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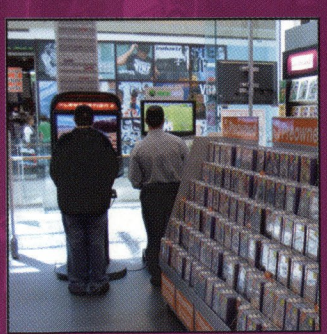

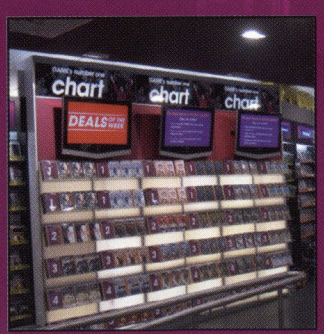

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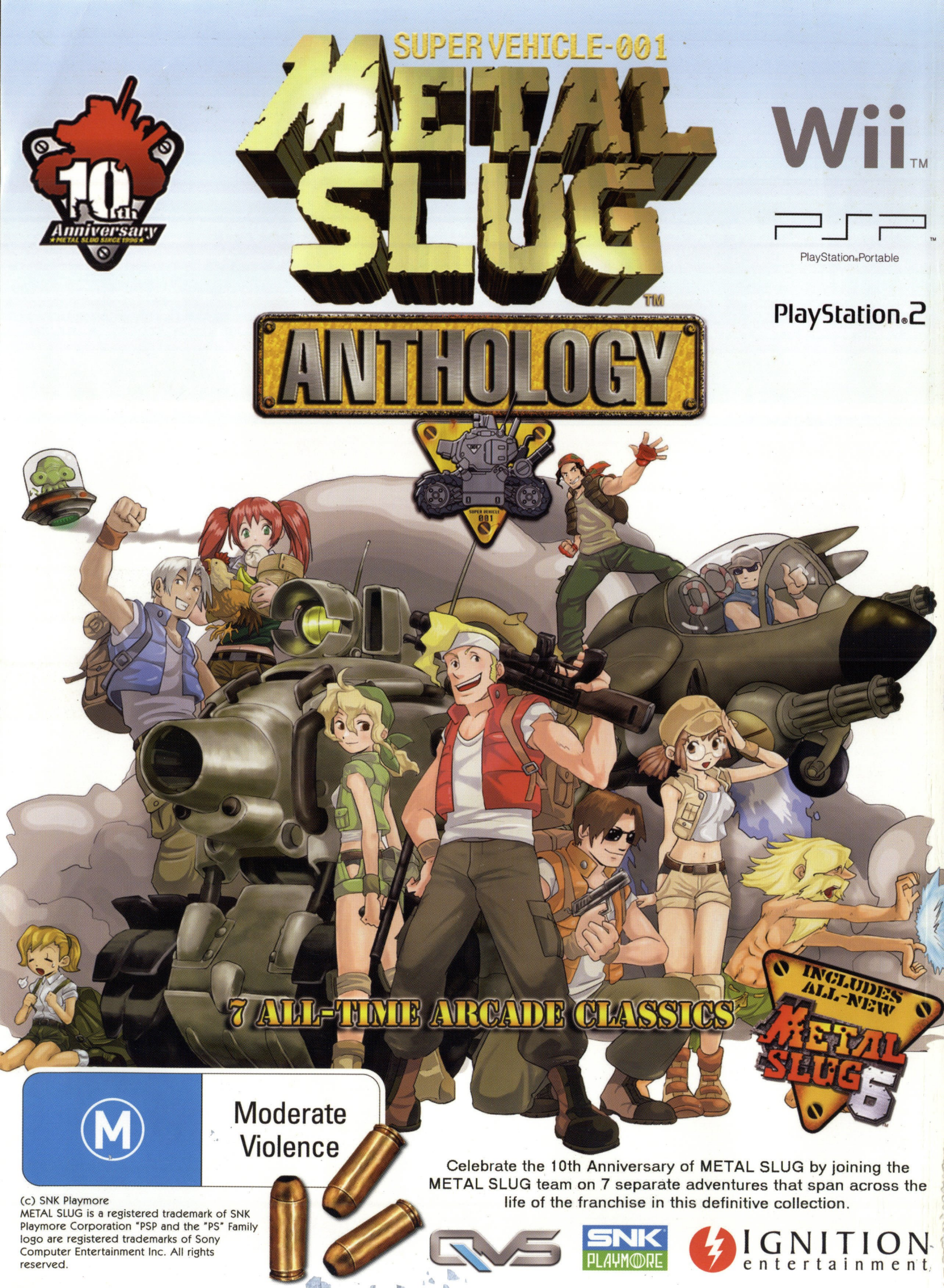

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