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World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King

REVIEWED

- LITTLE BIG PLANET
- WARHAMMER ONLINE
- FAR CRY 2
- FABLE 2

TOKYO GAME SHOW

All the new info from the Land of the Rising Fun!

A next MAGAZINE

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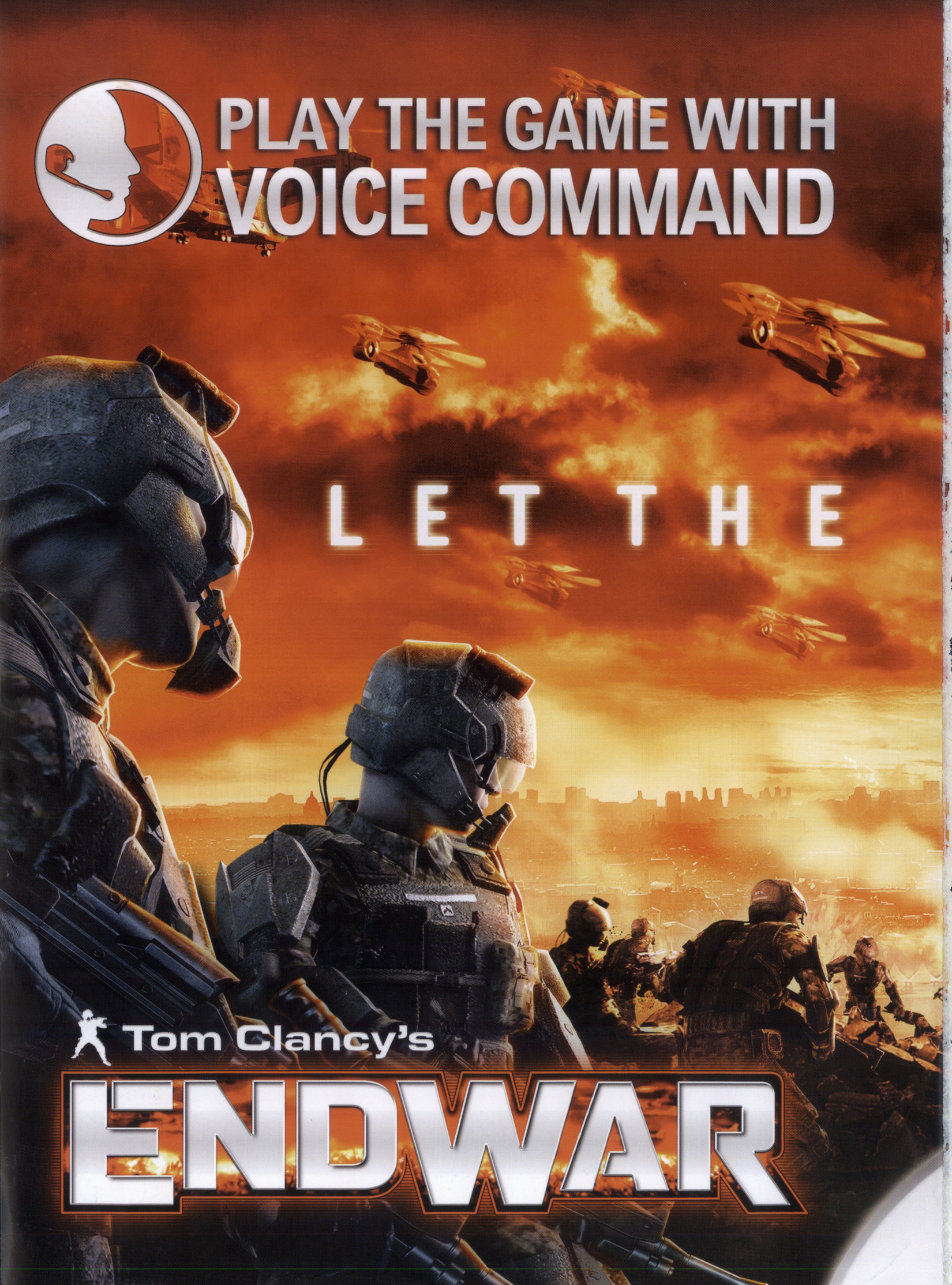
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WORLD OF WARCRAFT
WRATH of the LICH KING™
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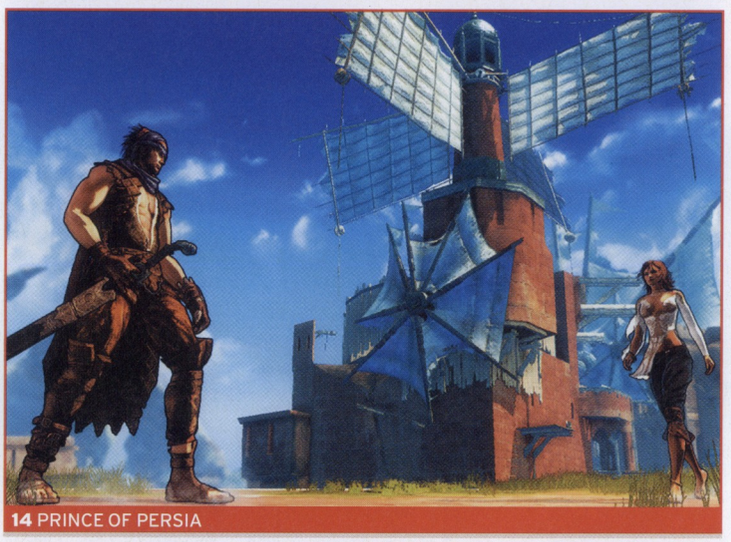

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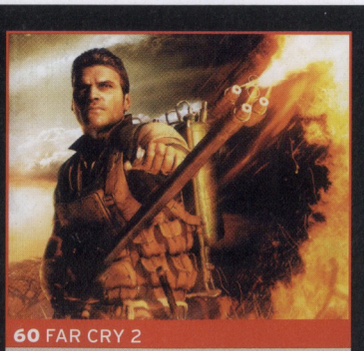

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Far fewer tentacles than anime would lead us to expect

Editorial

I noticed a trend this month that really quite disturbs me. It disturbs me more than developers and publishers putting demands on the way in which we can review their games (stand by for next month's Bad Cop - it's sure to garner me a few publisher cold-shoulders). What I'm talking about is how developers and publishers label their games more and more as either being a core game or a casual game. I find this whole style of categorisation to be divisive, as any time someone labels something as being either core or casual it essentialy cuts the gaming public in half. Call a game casual and core gamers don't want a bar of it. Call it core and the casual think it will be too complex. Take a look at two games we reviewed this month - Fable 2 and LittleBigPlanet. They both straddle, like the mighty Colossus of Rhodes, each side of the gaming divide. Both games are immediately accessible to the casual but feature a depth of gameplay that will appeal to the core, but even so, during the development and review periods we heard familiar rumblings of casual and core. With the review code of Fable 2 we received a letter from Peter Molyneux begging us to give the game to someone casual so we could watch them play it. I can kind of see where he's coming from - the game is so personal to each player thanks to the consequences the player's actions have on the world - but is there really any need to specifically point out that the casual gamer can get into it too? Really, shouldn't anyone who plays a game be considered a gamer, especially in this day and age in which it seems that everyone and their grandma seems to have at least one gaming format?

Anyway, welcome to issue 182, as jam-packed an issue as you could hope for, with a trip to TGS, a craptonne of reviews and enough features to keep everyone happy. Speaking of happy, I'd just like to extend my apologies to all our SA readers for last month's debacle with issues arriving very late. Boot has been put to arse to make sure it won't happen again. After all, you already live in SA. You don't need us adding to your miseries.

Daniel Wilks >> Editor

HYPER CREW

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL - Editor

1. **Fable 2** - *360*
   "I totally gave the foreman the finger. Awesome."
2. **LittleBigPlanet** - *PS3*
3. **Warhammer Online** - *PC*
4. **Prince of Persia** - *360*
5. **MK vs DC** - *PS3*

DARREN - Deputy Editor

1. **Saints Row 2** - 360
   "Streaking. Enough said."
2. **LittleBigPlanet** - PS3
3. **Far Cry 2** - 360
4. **Midnight Club: LA** - 360
5. **Solitaire** - iPhone

MALCOLM - Art Director

1. **de Blob** - *Wii*
   "Can't... leave... level... must... get... 100%..."
2. **LittleBigPlanet** - *PS3*
3. **Bioshock** - *PS3*
4. **Team Fortress 2** - *PC*
5. **Kung Fu Panda** - *PS3*

JAMES O'CONNOR - Some Guy

1. **Bubble** - *Work Computer*
   "I really hope my boss doesn't read Hyper"
2. **Force Unleashed** - *360*
3. **Professor Layton** - *DS*
4. **Puzzle Quest** - *XBLA*
5. **Tiger Woods 09** - *360*

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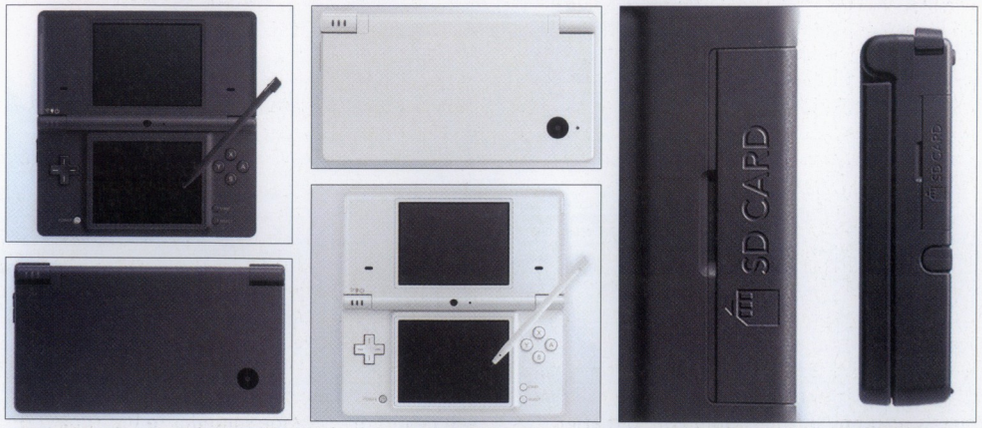


Nintendo announces DSi

Cameras, SD card slot, downloadable software, oh my!

Seems that old dogs can learn new tricks, provided you take the dog apart, rebuild him with new features, and sell him while the older model is still racing off the shelves like hotcakes. Jumbled metaphors aside, that's exactly what Nintendo has done with its crazy popular DS handheld, announcing a new model at this year's Tokyo Game Show.

The DSi, as it's been named, packs a host of new features into Nintendo's little wonder machine, but sacrifices a few along the way. The fact that the screens are slightly bigger – and the overall form factor slightly smaller – is perhaps the most insignificant, for this is a device that's geared to take full advantage of the multimedia and online worlds.

Two cameras have been integrated into the DSi: one on the back and one on the inside of the hinge, outputting a resolution of 640 x 480. An SD card slot has also been included, and new software allows the playback, pitch adjustment and playback speed shifting of AAC music files. Existing buttons get switched and shuffled (Power now goes back to being a push button, rather than a switch as it was with the DS Lite) and in-built flash memory houses a proprietary web browser. That's right: the DSi is internet-ready.

Not only that, but Nintendo is looking to use the web for content delivery. Extra applications and even games available for purchase online via the DSWare store, paid for with Nintendo Points. Region locks on this content will be implemented, in much the same way that Apple's iTunes service restricts some countries from purchasing certain material, and Nintendo is looking to help out new DSi owners by offering them 1000 free purchase points until 2010.

However, it all comes with catch. Well two catches. All that new tech has to fit in somewhere, and since DS space is at a premium, the GBA slot has been removed. While some might shrug in a "but-I-don't-have-any-GBA-games-anyway" manner, keep in mind that it was used for some DS games, such as Guitar Hero: On Tour. Owners of such titles will have to stick with their current devices if they wish to keep playing. Furthermore, battery life has taken a hit, though to what extent remains unclear.

All up, however, it's certainly a worthy redesign, and brings some serious fight to Sony's PSP updates, which have brought Skype and game downloads to the handheld device. However, one can't help but ponder over the addition of an SD slot, given its role in piracy circles with the current R4 card. No doubt this is something that Nintendo will address in terms of the DSi's security, but the hacking race that persists with the PSP's constant firmware updates demonstrates that no device is infallible. We shall watch with interest.

Portal: Prelude released

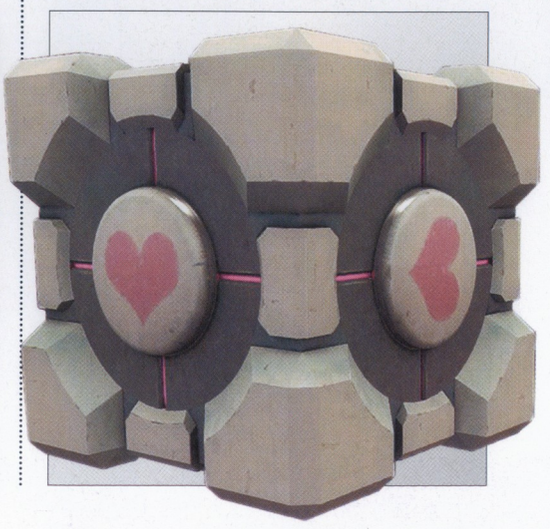
Bad news: it kind of sucks

Fans of GlaDOS, cake and Weighted Companion Cubes have itched for more Portal gameplay since the final note was sung during that game's end credits, and although Valve remains busy at work on Portal 2, a few years sit between now and the time when we'll get to play it. But in the here and now, a fan-made prequel has been released for the princely sum of nothing, available to all with a desire for more portal-based action.

Titled Portal: Prelude, the mod is centred around the exploits of another Aperture Science test subject before GlaDOS even entered the scene. Humans oversee the training rather than a passive-aggressive AI, and monitor your progress in a manner similar to their computer counterpart. Naturally, you've got to rely on your wits and your portal gun as you navigate around the rooms of the facility.

Trouble is, the finesse that contributed to Portal's success is severely lacking in this mod. Rather than emulating the original game's sense of player reward and its polished level design, areas in Prelude require pixel-perfect precision and lightning fast reflexes to navigate. Fail to shoot your portal in the exact area required and expect to spend many brain-bashing moments as you try, try, and try again. In fact, the reception to Prelude has become so heated on its official forums that, as of going to print, they have been shut down entirely. Guess it says something for Valve's programming prowess.

In any case, head to ***www.portalprelude.com*** and judge for yourself. Portal: Prelude is a rather hefty mod, weighing in at over 700MB, so grab it via your ISP mirror if you can. Just don't say we didn't warn you.



CAPTION THIS! #107

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at *captionthis@next.com.au* with **Caption This Part 107** in the subject line.

New Xbox Experience is nearly here

Well, a redesigned dashboard and player avatars, at least

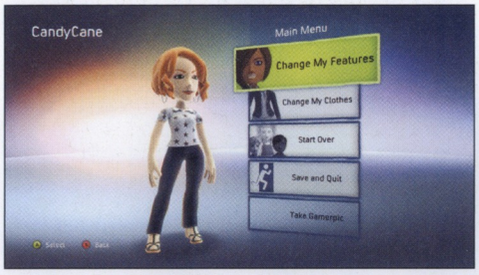
Forget the blades. They're gone. A fancy-schmancy interface is on its way to the Xbox 360, with Microsoft hauling in Schematic – the company that, among other things, designed the swishy displays fondled by Tom Cruise in Minority Report – and getting them to put together a new interface for the console from scratch. They're calling the result the New Xbox Experience, and it's more than just a lick of new paint.

Yes, it does look radically different. The menu now resembles the design of Windows Media Centre, with clear text indicating what each section does, complimented by a page preview that flows underneath. Its default theme is clean and minimalist, but more colour is able to be splashed around via extra themes, which can now be previewed before being selected.

In a move that many have interpreted as "borrowing" from Nintendo, Xbox LIVE now supports Avatars. Head, face, body, clothing... the lot can be customised as you wish, with the end result/monstrosity able to be used as your Gamerpic. With over 14 million people on Xbox's online service, at least this gives them all a way to express themselves.

One of the major new features that comes with the update is the ability to install games to your 360's hard drive. The original game disc will need to be read once upon loading, just so it can verify there's no funny business going on, but after that it's all HDD action, all the time. Doing so will drastically cutting down game load times and, since there's no spinning disc, you'll be without a significant portion of console noise.

> **As we've said before, Microsoft has no plans to introduce an Xbox 360 Blu-ray add-on**

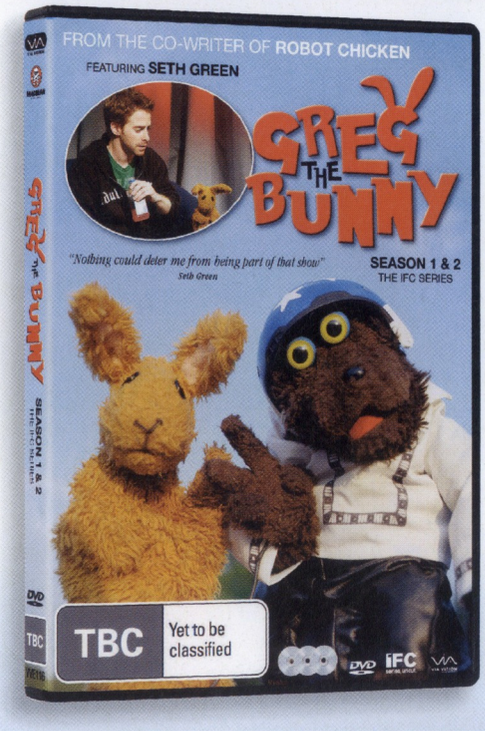


A gaggle of further features come with the update, which is set to launch on November 19. Microsoft has stated that it will require 128MB of space, and while they acknowledge that not everyone has that much space available – be it due to the lack of a hard drive or the lack of free bytes to spare – they say that a solution is on the way... without saying what that solution is.

"While we expect the majority of consumers to download the New Xbox Experience without a problem, a small percentage of Xbox 360 owners do not have enough memory to accommodate the update. To help ensure all Xbox LIVE members are able to download the New Xbox Experience and enjoy its new features, Microsoft will be offering storage solutions to the Xbox LIVE community. We are not sharing details of this offering yet."

In related news, rumours have yet again surfaced on plans to release a Blu-ray drive for the 360, and yet again Microsoft has shot them down. In a statement to Edge Online, a spokesperson said: "As we've said before, Microsoft has no plans to introduce an Xbox 360 Blu-ray add-on. Games are what drive consumers to purchase game consoles, and we remain focused on providing the largest library of blockbuster games available." Seems like they're getting fed up with that one, but surely it's only a matter of time...

FROM THE CO-WRITER OF ROBOT CHICKEN



PUPPETS WITH A PASSION FOR PARODY... AND SEX... DRUGS & VIOLENCE. Warning puppet sex may offend!

FEATURING **SETH GREEN**

Best known for his starring role alongside Seth Green (*Family Guy, Robot Chicken*) in his self-titled Fox Sitcom (*Greg The Bunny*), America's most notorious puppet is back in his most definitely not-for-kids show!

"Nothing could deter me from being part of that show"
- Seth Green

"Greg, I say we take these girls up to the VIP room... Warren needs his helmet polished" - Warren the Ape

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Windows 7: Not annoying

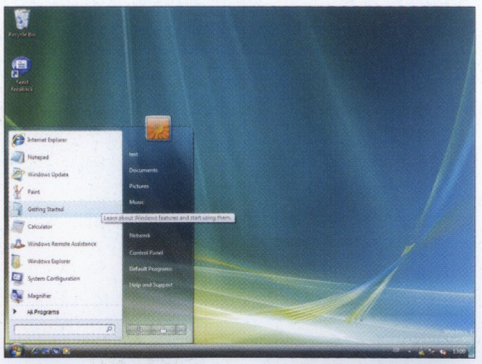
No UAC, no worries

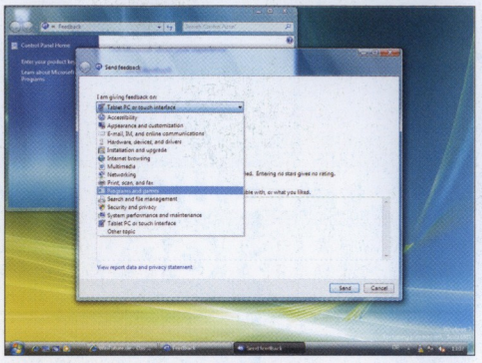
With consumers' response to Windows Vista lacklustre at best, and hate-filled at worst, Microsoft needs to ensure that its next operating system, tentatively titled Windows 7, wins back their favour. One of Vista's main sticking points was its UAC system, a dialogue box that would pop up requesting confirmation of pretty much every action. Are you sure you want to install this program? Are you sure you want to run this program? Are you sure you want to open this folder? Are you sure? Are you really sure? No, seriously, are you absolutely sure? You get the idea.

It's a feature that was designed with security in mind, but just ended up annoying users rather than protecting them. In fact, a search for "Vista UAC" on YouTube brings up countless clips demonstrating how to turn the feature off – something that no doubt reddens the faces of those behind its development. With Windows 7 fast-tracked into development, UAC has been addressed by the Microsoft team at length, with the situation whittled down to four points:

- Reduce unnecessary or duplicated prompts in Windows and the ecosystem, such that critical prompts can be more easily identified.
- Enable our customers to be more confident that they are in control of their systems.
- Make prompts informative such that people can make more confident choices.
- Provide better and more obvious control over the mechanism.

Vista was a pretty costly exercise to learn those above points, but we're glad Microsoft is finally seeing the light. For the full report, complete with sexy bar and line graphs, wander over to ***blogs.msdn.com/e7/archive/2008/10/08/user-account-control.aspx.***

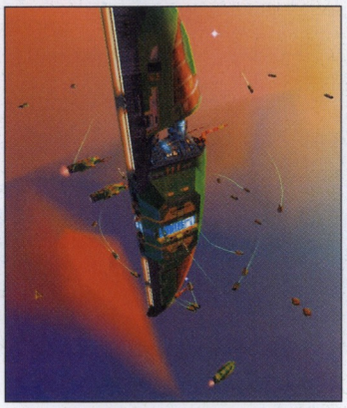




Sierra servers: Closed for business

Some of them, anyway

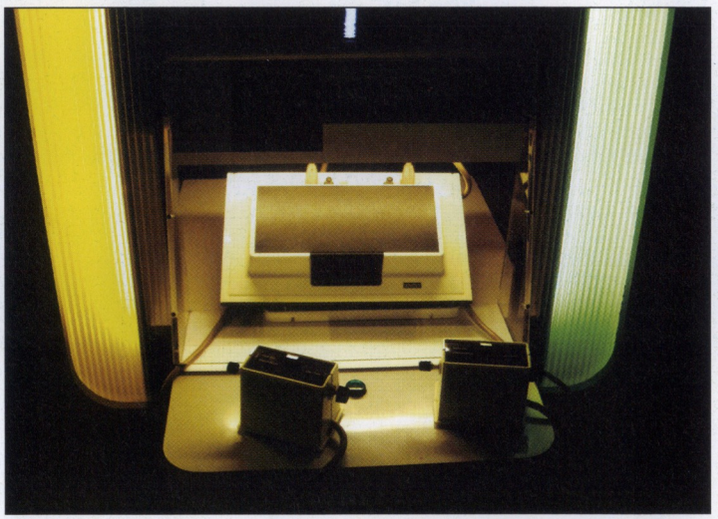
Still getting your multiplayer kicks from the likes of Alien vs Predator 2, No One Loves Forever 2, or Empire Earth 2? Well, not for much longer you're not. A rather clinical announcement on the Sierra Community Forums revealed plans to shut down the multiplayer servers for 21 of its games, the switch set for being flicked on November 1. No explanation for the closure was given, but it could either stem from the Activision/Blizzard merger, or the natural phasing out era that comes with ageing titles. Either way, losing the ability to play Homeworld, Dark Reign 2, Arcanum and Tribes 2 kind of sucks.



The full list of games getting their plugs pulled:

1. **Alien vs Predator 2**
2. **Arcanum**
3. **Caesar IV**
4. **Dark Reign 2**
5. **Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom**
6. **Empire Earth**
7. **Empire Earth 2**
8. **Empire Earth: Age of Conquest**
9. **Ground Control**
10. **Ground Control2**
11. **Homeworld**
12. **Homeworld: Cataclysm**
13. **Nolf2**
14. **Red Baron**
15. **Sanity**
16. **Star Trek: Armada**
17. **SWAT3: EE**
18. **SWAT3: GOTY**
19. **The Incredible Machine**
20. **Tribes2**
21. **Vampire**

Some solid titles among that lot. Feel free to direct your responses to "*Eric@Sierra*", but given the definitive feel of his post, don't expect much in the way of an about-face.



Game On expo hits Brisbane

Retro fun awaits!

Melbourne's hogged the fun for long enough – now it's Brisbane's turn to check out the Game On expo. The Australian Centre for Moving Images has put together one of the most comprehensive and entertaining histories of gaming, complete with retro cabinets and original pieces of concept art by names that are now among gaming's most influential. Want to see a picture of Mario hand-drawn by Shigeru Miyamoto? Of course you do. That's why you'll want to lock sometime between November 17 to February 15 in your calendar and set aside $18 in your wallet to get in and bask in the glory. Oh, and living in Brisbane would also help.

No word on when other capital cities are getting a look in, but here's hoping one-horse backwaters like Sydney and Perth are on the agenda at some point. For now, check out ***www.acmi.net.au.***

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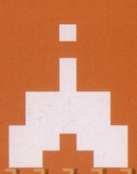

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Prince of Persia

HANDS-ON

SYSTEM: Xbox 360, PS3

CATEGORY: Action

PLAYERS: 1

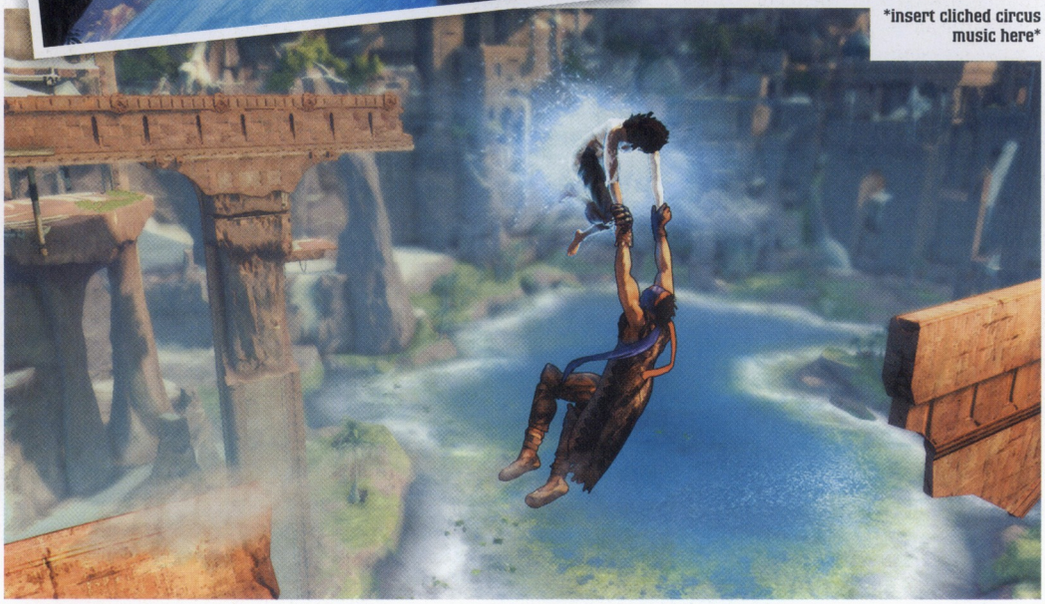
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft

DUE: December

Finally, after months of waiting and drooling over the beautiful, beautiful art we have had a chance to get some hands on time with Prince of Persia and we have to say – even though it is a hoary old cliché – this ain't your daddy's Prince of Persia. It's a whole new beast built around the old premise of movement puzzles and combat. Unlike previous games, the new Prince of Persia is essentially a movement puzzle sandbox, with the player free to approach the levels in the order they choose rather than being forced to follow a very definitive movement path. For our hands on session we only had the opportunity to play through the introduction and the Ruined Citadel region, but after a good three or so hours of playing we think we have a pretty good handle on how the game will play.

'Tis a fine archway, English, but sure 'tis no pool.

Hardly a practical outfit in that wind. Put a coat on, girl!



insert cliched circus music here

The new Prince of Persia is essentially a movement puzzle sandbox, with the player free to approach the levels in the order they choose

As we have previously reported, The Sands of Time trilogy is officially over, and with its passing goes the Prince's ability to control time. In its place is a new mechanic who goes by the name of Elika. Introduced in the intro sequence, Elika is a magical young woman, the daughter of the king responsible for releasing the evil god responsible for to doom falling upon the land. Unlike other companions in games, Elika is neither stupid (in an AI sense) nor passive. She is, instead, a context sensitive helper keyed to the Y button. When you're lost, hitting Y causes Elika to point out the direction the Prince should go. During a jump hitting Y causes Ellika to throw you further.

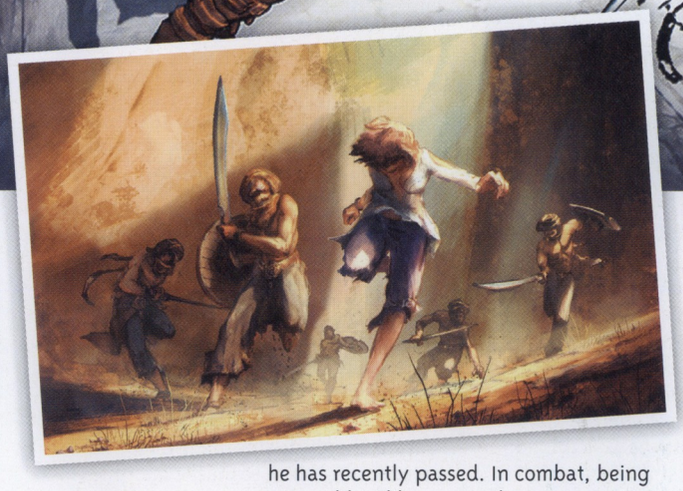
During combat Y is an Elika attack. Extra movement powers that can be bought throughout the game to give acess to previously inaccessible areas are keyed to the Y button as well. It's a great mechanic that fills the void left by time control, and she's a pretty cool power to boot. While Elika may not be as immediately as impressive a mechanic as time control she is nonetheless a fantastic addition to the franchise.

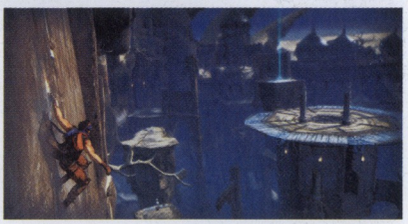
FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT!

As it stands the game is not without problems, especially when it comes to combat. The basic concept of combat is very strong; every battle is fought one-on-one, even if there are multiple combatants in the area, making every fight feel somewhat epic and hard-won. If anything, combat feels quite similar to that of Ubisoft's other movement based franchise, Assassin's Creed, in that it works more on a system of precisely timed parry and ripostes than it does on simple button mashing. Each one of the face buttons controls one attack – X is a basic sword attack, A is an acrobatic attack, B is a glove/throw attack and Y is an Elika attack. Holding down the right trigger blocks, hitting the right trigger the moment before an enemy attack parries the attack, enabling the player to make a few attacks for extra damage. All four of the face button attacks can be comboed together in nearly any order. During basic fights the system works quite well.

During boss battles the system is somewhat punishing. Rather than having a standard health meter, the Prince is essentially immortal. If he's ever in a near death situation – such as falling off a cliff or he's about to be stabbed in the face by a big nasty creature – Elika steps in to save him. During the movement sections this basically works as a checkpoint system, with Elik depositing the Prince back on the closest flat area

"When Fountain Pens Attack" doesn't have the same ring to it...





he has recently passed. In combat, being rescued by Elika causes the enemy to heal a third or more of their health bar. In basic combat this is easy to deal with but during boss battles it is something of a chore. Killing bosses necessitates the use of parries but the timing is very precise. Miss two parries and you'll find yourself having to do a very quick button mash to escape or otherwise Elika has to step in and you have to fight the battle all over again. The press notes we received alongside the game say that there will be numerous tweaks made to the combat engine before the game goes gold. We really hope that a number of these tweaks will be on the timing and difficulty of performing a parry and the miniscule amount of damage bosses take from standard attacks.

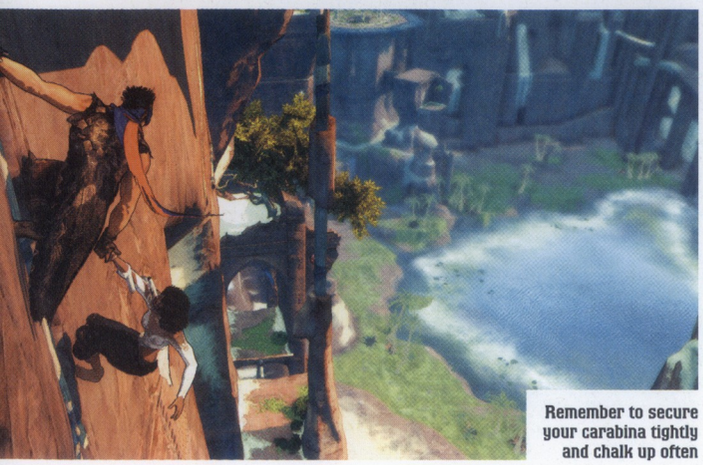
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some real fine tuning of the combat. Our review code.

DUDE, WHERE'S MY ORB?

The combat may be a little iffy at the moment but the movement puzzles are as brilliant as ever. From the central hub, Prince of Persia splits off into four different regions, each made up of four different areas. How players progress through these areas is up to them but the goal is always the same: defeat the boss of the level and heal the land. Healing the land releases magical orbs that must be collected to purchase new powers for Elika, enabling the player to move on to a new area or to reach a previously inaccessible area in the current region. Even without the new movement powers, the Prince is still a remarkably spry man – he can still jump with the best of them, hang from ledges, wall run and wall jump, but now he can also use his glove to control a descent down a wall and use it for a roof-run. Roof runs are similar to wall runs but require the occasional handhold to give the Prince purchase and momentum.

Prince of Persia: The Fallen King is shaping up to be one of the best looking games around. The modified Assassin's Creed engine does a great job rendering the complex animations and the bright, painterly art style suits the action perfectly. To be honest we're still not sure about the dialogue and voice actor for the Prince – to us he sounds a little too Valley Boy or California surf bum; we half expect him to call someone "dude" every time he opens his mouth. Still, he may grow on us over the course of his adventure. «



Remember to secure your carabina tightly and chalk up often

James Bond: Quantum of Solace

The James Bond franchise has been something of a roller coaster over the years, with a few decent games, one truly great game (Goldeneye, obviously) and a string of absolute shockers, including Goldeneye (the fairly recent one that is, not the N64 one), From Russia With Love, Agent Under Fire and Nightfire. Add to that the fact that with very few exceptions games based on films are about as much fun as poking yourself in the eye with a blunt stick and you can see how excited we were about getting a chance to play a few levels of James Bond: Quantum of Solace. Now that we've had a chance to make our way through two levels we have to change our tune a little bit. There is still some tweaking that needs to be done before the game is released but as it stands, Quantum of Solace is the best Bond game we've played since Goldeneye (the good one, of course). While that isn't necessarily the hardest task in the world to achieve, we really do mean it as a compliment.

Rather than simply following the events of the upcoming Bond film, James Bond: Quantum of Solace features levels taken from both of the Daniel Craig Bond films, Casino Royale and Quantum of Solace, extended and expanded into FPS levels. We had a chance to play a level from each film. Without story context, the level from Quantum of Solace level saw us fighting through some sewers, up onto a street and then across rooftops. The shooting mechanics feel very solid – as well they should. Quantum of Solace not only shares engines with Call of Duty: World at War, it also shares many of the same combat mechanics, most notably the excellent zoom/aim assist that debuted in Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat. In addition to the excellent aim mechanics, Quantum of Solace features a cover mechanic highly reminiscent of Gears of War, enabling players to dash from one piece of cover to another, vault low cover, edge forward behind cover and blind fire, all at the touch of a single context sensitive button. This cover mechanic really gives a nice sense of tactical pacing to the proceedings.

The second level we had a chance to play, Casino Royale really showcased how the developers have turned the events of the film into FPS fodder. The level takes place during the hiatus in the poker game, during which Le Chiffre is captured and threatened by Steven Obanno, the resistance leader whose money Le Chiffre lost. Instead of simply shooting a few guards and fighting Obanno down the fire escape as in the film, the level sees Bond having to fight his way through the hotel, killing Obanno's small army of guards before taking part in a little stealth and finally the fight with Obanno on the stairs. To keep the final fight in line with the movie, the fight is done as a quick-time event. We're not too crash hot on QT events as a whole but this one seemed to work pretty well.

Unfortunately due to strict embargos (to avoid spoilers) we won't be able to get a more in-depth look at the game until Quantum of Solace comes out in theatres later this year but even so, we're really looking forward to seeing how Quantum of Solace comes together. The stop-and-pop shooting mechanics work really well, as does the zoom/aim assist lifted in its entirety from the Call of Duty franchise. If the developers can tweak the game so the AI is a little more intelligent, create some new character models so you don't end up shooting the same guy multiple times during a level and tweak the reliability of the context sensitive button, then we think they'll have a real winner on their hands. «

HANDS-ON

SYSTEM:
Xbox 360, PS3, PS2, PC, Wii, DS

CATEGORY:
FPS

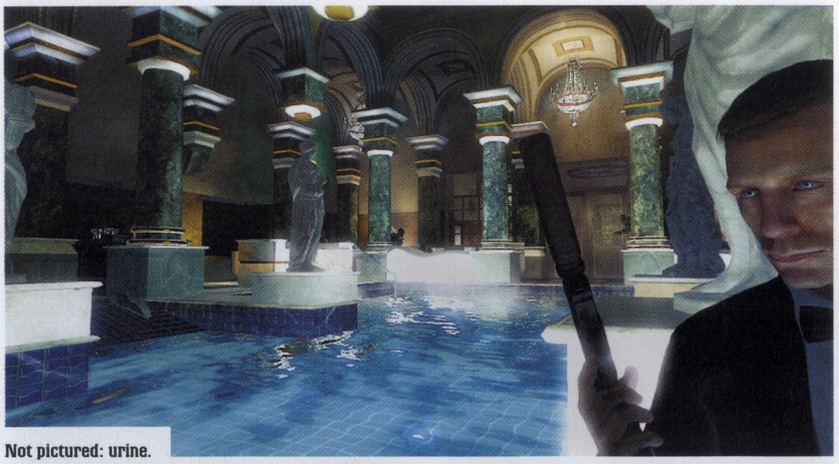
PLAYERS:
1-12

DEVELOPER:
Treyarch

DUE:
November 19

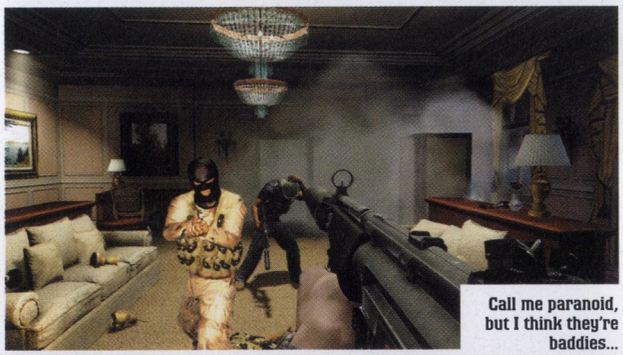
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The new movie – seriously, Daniel Craig makes a kick-arse Bond.



Not pictured: urine.

Quantum of Solace features levels taken from both of the Daniel Craig Bond films, extended and expanded into FPS levels



Call me paranoid, but I think they're baddies...

All hail exploding barrels!

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Tomb Raider Underworld

For the eighth installment in the Tomb Raider franchise, Crystal Dynamics have remembered the best way to keep the series in the public eye - unveiling a new 'official' Lara model, professional gymnast Alison Carrol. It's a smart move, but also a curious one when you consider the company's clear attempts to move the franchise away from its T&A public conception. But as nice as it is that the developers have employed an incredibly attractive woman to look pretty and perform the occasional cartwheel in short-shorts, the actual game is shaping up to be more than interesting enough to garner attention all by itself.

SYSTEM:
360, PS3, Wii, PS2, PC

CATEGORY:
Action

PLAYERS:
1

DEVELOPER:
Crystal Dynamics

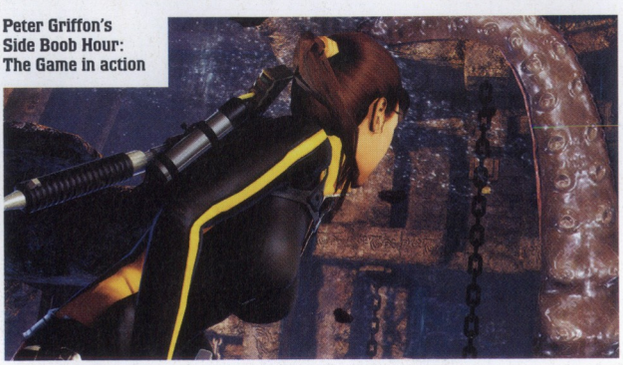
DUE:
November 21

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A much tighter combat engine to compliment the series' excellent platform sections. Much improved hand to hand combat has been promised

RAIDING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

As Crystal Dynamic's third shot at the series, having resucitated the franchise from the near point of being crap with the excellent TR: Legend in 2006, the pressure is on to show that Tomb Raider is more fresh, relevant and important than ever. Plot wise, details are fairly sketchy. Lara is looking to recover 'Thor's Hammer', an ancient weapon of immense power. There's rumblings of an ancient, potentially world-destroying force being unleashed along the way, and quite a few nods back to older games in the series for long-time fans. The game takes a bit of a risk by opening with an underwater level set in the Mediterranean Ocean, which sees Lara flipping the bird at science by taking down sharks with her signature pistols. The vast majority of the game takes place on land though, as Lara travels to Mexico, Thailand, and other currently unrevealed locations in her tomb-raiding quest.



Peter Griffon's Side Boob Hour: The Game in action

Vishnu once caught two fish THIS BIG and THIS BIG

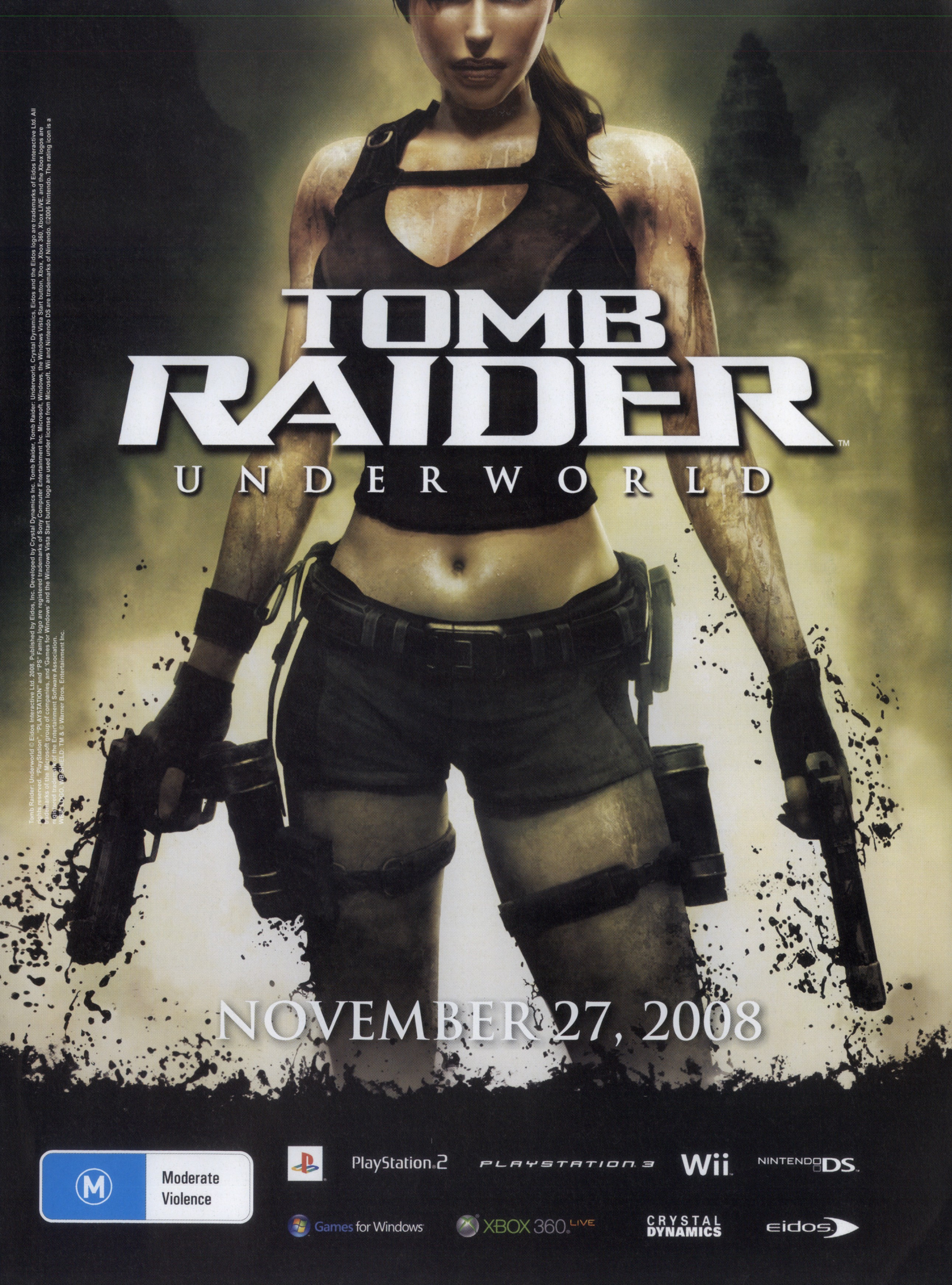
> **The emphasis is, as it should be, on exploring, jumping, climbing and interacting with the environment**

JUMP INTO IT

The emphasis is, as it should be, on exploring, jumping, climbing and interacting with the environment. Lara's grapple, introduced in Legend, has been tweaked slightly to allow for pushing as well as pulling, and a greater emphasis has been put on being able to do more with the items Lara gets her hands on. The game has been designed in a much more open fashion too, with the developers claiming you'll be able to tackle goals in a non-linear fashion and that every action has a lasting effect. Dead bodies won't evaporate away and items you've moved won't reset when you leave the room. If the team expands on the environmental interaction offered up in previous games, as promised, we could be seeing some truly epic environmental puzzles. Even quick time events have been replaced by 'adrenaline moments', in which time slows down and complete control is handed over to you during a cutscene, giving you a chance to save Lara from peril. Whether or not this will actually be any more enjoyable than the old hackneyed QTE remains to be seen.

The 360/PS3/PC versions of Underworld are shaping up very well, progressing the series in a logical, intelligent direction. It is worrying, however, that absolutely nothing has been revealed of the Wii, PS2 or DS versions at the time of writing. If history is any indicator, this means they're probably not going to be stellar. Underworld drops on November 21, so expect a full review very soon.

James O'Connor «



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FEAR 2: Project Origin

SYSTEM: 360, PS3, PC

CATEGORY: FPS

PLAYERS: 1-?

DEVELOPER: Monolith

DUE: February, 2009

The PR manager for Warner Bros expressed to us his dismay at the amount of ink that's been spent on explaining the legal saga behind the FEAR franchise. Split assets, name changes, two separate games... you know the story. Well, this paragraph of ink is no different, save for one tiny titbit: Project Origin, the game that was once no longer FEAR 2, is now called FEAR 2. The game that retained the universe, but not the name, has regained the rights to the FEAR brand, resulting in this, the melding of two names to form the one product.

FEAR 2: Project Origin ignores the events seen in the expansion packs and picks up a few minutes before the climactic scenes of the original game. As a regular soldier dropped into the aftermath, it's not long before you're drawn into the events of Armacham. Although you're not naturally gifted in the bullet-dodging department like the previous game's eponymous Point Man, a not-entirely-voluntary surgical procedure soon bestows you with these powers. Sure, it's even more of a cliché now than it was in 2006, but considering the level of FEAR's enemy AI, its use becomes almost essential.

> **it's typical FEAR gameplay: bullet time, hyper-smart soldiers, the occasional scare**

We were reminded of this as we played through an E3 demo of the game. The level wasn't a section of actual gameplay, but was an amalgamation of elements that best demonstrate what the sequel will offer. So although it wasn't a set piece that will appear in the final game, it gave us an idea of what's in store.

For the most part, it's typical FEAR gameplay: bullet time, hyper-smart soldiers, the occasional scare. The game's engine is even the same, though you wouldn't think so to look at it, for the extra bells and whistles that have been strapped on truly bring it up to today's standards. The renowned AI level is certainly there in spades, and the new elements in the environment give enemy soldiers more tactical options. They might approach a car and open a door, ducking behind it for cover. If you kick over a desk for a doorway barricade, they might kick it right back as they charge in.

Soldiers have the smarts, no doubt about that, but with that exemplary AI comes one of our main concerns. Since enemies are able to present a significant amount of resistance to the player, the chance is very real that the developers will use that to pad out the game's length rather than by presenting more levels. Why build more environment geometry when you can stonewall the player in an already-existing scene? It's a concern that Warner's PR rep was unable to answer, and we imagine that we won't find out until an updated build of the game is made available. Fingers remain crossed that developer laziness (or limited funds) does not limit the player's journey.

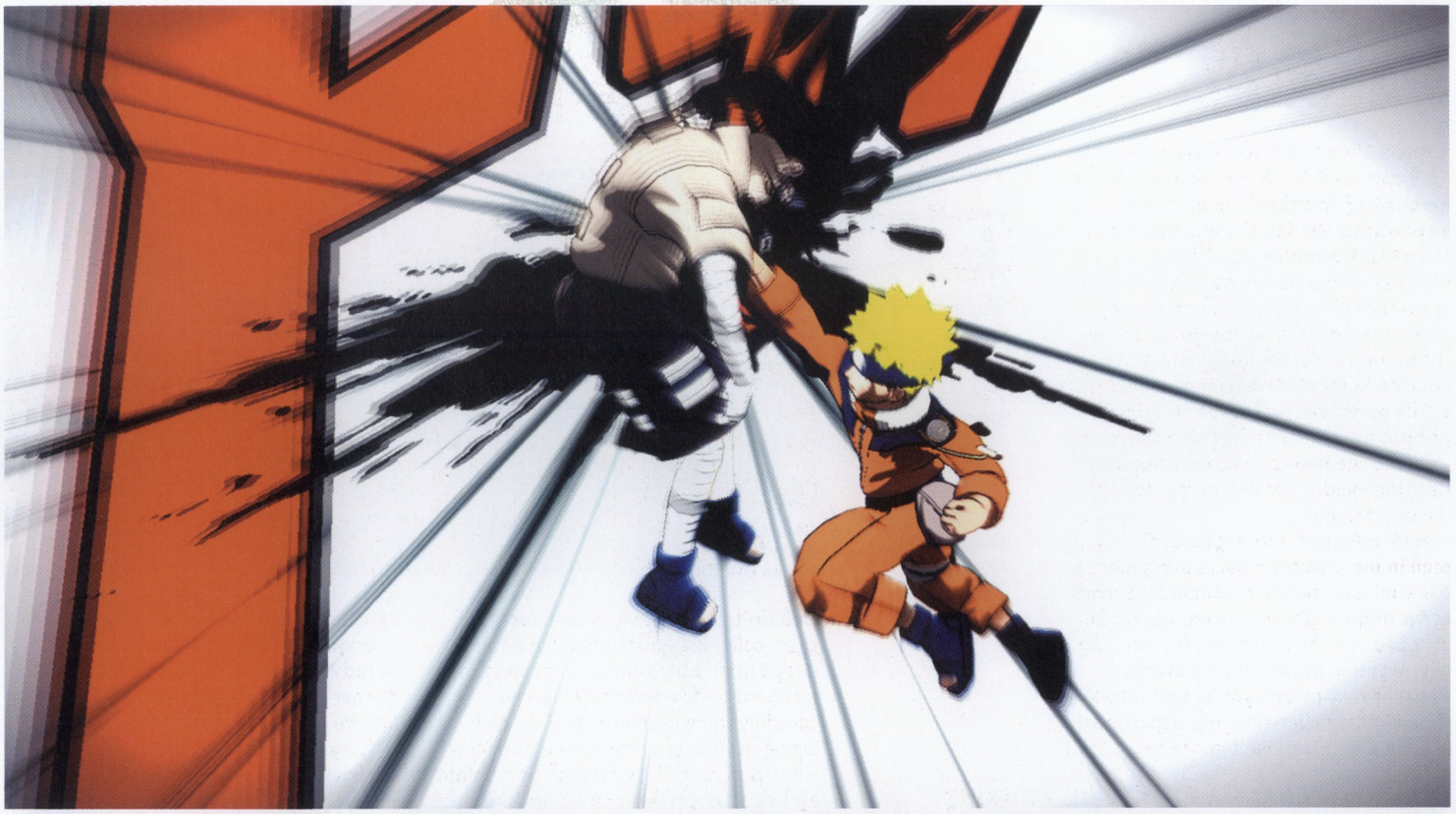
It's pretty much a given that FEAR fans will be keen to check this one out, and considering that we're yet to see an actual slice of the game as opposed to a specially built demo, so are we. There's plenty of potential in this franchise, and if it takes on board the criticisms thrown its way from Round One – claustrophobic corridor levels, clichéd "black cat" scares – there's every chance that Round Two will deliver. «

That's what you get for having stylish modern furnishings!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

An actual level of the game.

Ever been so drunk you tried to shave with a cheese grater?



Naruto: The Broken Bond

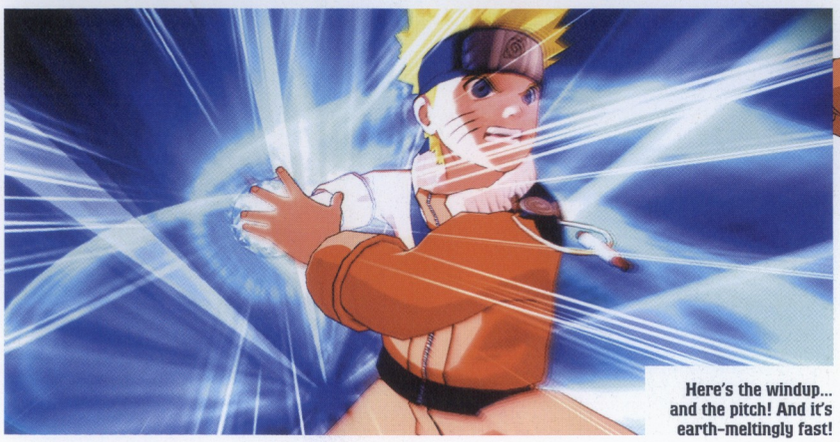
Taking off immediately where Ubisoft's previous Naruto game, Rise of a Ninja, left off, Naruto: The Broken Bond sees the eponymous ninja and his friends having to rebuild and defend Kohona Village. For the sequel, Ubisoft Montreal has decided to tone down the fighting elements of the first game and highlight the adventure and exploration. Instead of being a solo outing like the first game, Naruto: The Broken Bond sees players controlling not only Naruto but also two other characters chosen from a roster of seven that includes such fan favourites as Shikamaru, Neji, Sasuke and, of course, Naruto himself.

Each of the characters will have access to their own unique abilities to aid in puzzle solving and combat; Neji has the ability to sense danger so can guide other characters through traps and dangerous terrain without harm, Naruto can sprint and create clones of himself and Shikamaru can stretch his shadow great lengths and then travel along the length in safety. While certain levels will only be available to certain characters, to unlock everything in the game and find every secret, players will have to explore each of the areas with each character, using their special abilities to unlock different areas and hidden objectives.

Interestingly, Ubisoft Montreal has stated that Sasuke will not only have his own unique story arc, he will also have a unique art style for his levels that will supposedly highlight the conflicted nature of his psyche. We're not exactly sure how this will pan out but it should make for an interesting break from the cel-shading of the main game.

In keeping with the new adventure focus, the world of Naruto: The Broken Bond will be bigger and more open than in the previous game, with multiple paths through each area and many areas to explore. Fans of the fighting in the first game shouldn't be put off by the fact that it isn't the focus of the second game, because the engine has been tweaked nicely and players can now fight as a tag-team, switching characters in and out of the action during a brawl, so players can juggle enemies, swap jutsus and generally lay some serious smack on someone. The method of activating jutsus remains unchanged, but now Naruto has access to some new jutsus, including a highly damaging Chi-ball. The online multiplayer will remain intact with a roster of some 25 characters to find, unlock and play.

Once again Ubisoft Montreal look to be creating a game that should not only convert non-Naruto fans to the franchise, but also a game that actually manages to, in many ways, look better than the source material. The code we have is close to finished and is looking very polished. We should have a full review for you within an issue or two. «



Here's the windup... and the pitch! And it's earth-meltingly fast!

HANDS-ON

SYSTEM: 360

CATEGORY: Action

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal

DUE: November

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Other licensed anime properties turn out as good as the Ubisoft Naruto games.

Mortal Kombat Vs. DC Universe

When we first heard about MK vs. DC we were, like many people, rather flabbergasted (our gasteds were almost entirely flabbered) as to how Midway and DC came upon the idea of combining the two franchises, especially considering the characters that were being pulled from the DC ranks. How could some of the DC characters (the good guys, that is) be transposed over to a universe that's all about gory finishing moves? Superman may have the power to punch someone's head into orbit, but he's a boy scout and a fatality would pretty much be anathema to him. We recently had a chance to get some hands on time with Mortal Kombat vs. DC and, as we expected, it features all the strengths and weaknesses of the franchise – canned combos look great but once the buttons are pressed you're committed to the action. The new engine looks great, if somewhat plastic (especially in the case of Superman) and the animations are generally fantastic to boot.

The DC characters integrate into the MK world quite nicely, with some of the characters just coming across as very natural fits. The Flash and Catwoman especially feel as though they belong in the world. Both of the characters have unique move sets that cater to their strengths and powers. In the case of The Flash, the vast majority of his attacks involve him either running off the screen and attacking from the opposite side or otherwise using his speed to disorient or distract the opponent. In keeping with his speed-based powers, all of his combos are speed based as well, so the player might input a three-button combo but will be rewarded with an 11 hit combo. Catwoman has attacks based on and around her whip, using it to strike from a distance, grapple and trip. We were a little disappointed that some of the DC and MK characters essentially mirrored each other, however. Case in point: Batman and Scorpion. The move set of the two characters is all but identical, with Batman using different batarangs instead of Scorpion's grapple and fire attacks. So far we've only had a chance to see The Joker's fatality and we have to say it's a doozy – Mr J. pulls a gun, giggles and pulls the trigger. Rather than a bullet, a little flag saying "Bang!" comes out of the barrel. After another brief giggle and a look of relief from the intended victim, the Joker draws another gun and blows out his opponent's brains, giggles and does a little dance. It's all but perfect. If this is what we can expect from the other characters then we can't wait to see what's in store.

There are a few balance issues that we hope will be fixed by the time that MK vs. DC is released – both Sonja and Catwoman have a cartwheel-kick that is infinitely combo-able and nigh impossible to break and The Flash and Batman feel overpowered compared to the other DC characters – but with a little polishing this could be the game that puts the MK franchise back on the map. «

HANDS-ON

SYSTEM: 360, PS3

CATEGORY: Fighting

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Midway

DUE: TBA

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The final character roster and how the heroic DC characters will get around the whole fatality thing.

Flaming on the internet: you're doing it very right.

The DC characters integrate into the MK world nicely, coming across as very natural fits

Oh, just look down there for some boobies instead.

How come characters never seem to display any wounds? Huh?

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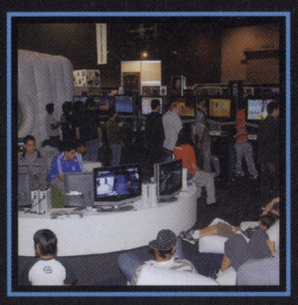

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Call of Duty: World at War

Devastation - I have it

Treyarch's last foray into the Call of Duty franchise was the low point of the franchise so far – more is the pity because we here at Hyper are quite large fans of Treyarch as a developer thanks to the first two Spider-Man: The Movie games – so we were a little worried when we heard that they were back in the driver's seat for the fifth game in the franchise, Call of Duty: World at War. To be honest we were also a little disappointed when we heard that the game was going to be heading back to WWII as a setting, a move we found rather strange considering the mind-blowing success of Call of Duty 4 and the modern day setting. We were worried that the new game was destined to be another forgettable foray into rushed and generic shooting, a-la Call of Duty 3. After having a chance to sit down and play two levels of the much anticipated shooter we can safely say that if these two levels are indicative of the design of Call of Duty: World at War then all of our fears have been groundless. It is shaping up to be a hell of a game.

The two levels we had a chance to play showcased portions of the American and Russian campaigns in the game and could not have been more different in approach. The American mission saw the player making their way through an open battlefield, taking out Japanese emplacements, destroying a tank patrol and eventually assaulting, capturing and then defending and airstrip, taking out anti-aircraft guns and then defending the walls from an enemy attack until friendly air support can bomb enemy positions. The Russian mission, on the other hand, takes place during the fall of Berlin and as such plays more like a first person slaughter than a traditional shooter. The early part of the mission sees the player sneaking through buildings to get the drop on hiding Germans (so you can gun them down with little or no resistance) before heading out onto the street for a tank-assisted massacre, ending with a very morally grey decision – some Russian soldiers have some German soldiers cornered and you are given the choice to either gun down the unarmed men or allow the soldiers to torch them with Molotov cocktails. It's an uneasy decision and one we suspect that is truly indicative of the direction the narrative of the game will take – namely that war makes monsters of men.

The actual look of the game has changed a bit, especially in the cutscenes. Now between missions players are treated to a mixture of archival footage, computer animation and animations highly reminiscent of old propaganda films – giant red arrows and evil faces spreading across the surface of the world. While the voice acting in the Russian mission was nothing special, the voice acting we heard in the American mission was outstanding. Keifer Sutherland lends his voice to the cast and has a pitch perfect macho/unbelievably tired style that makes him a pleasure to listen to.

Within the space of two or so hours we went from being rather sceptical about CoD: World at War to being absolute converts. We can't wait to see what Treyarch have in store for us in the rest of the game and we're just as eagerly anticipating some hands on time with multi-player.

HANDS-ON

SYSTEM:
Xbox 360, PS3, PS2, PC, Wii, DS

CATEGORY:
FPS

PLAYERS:
1+

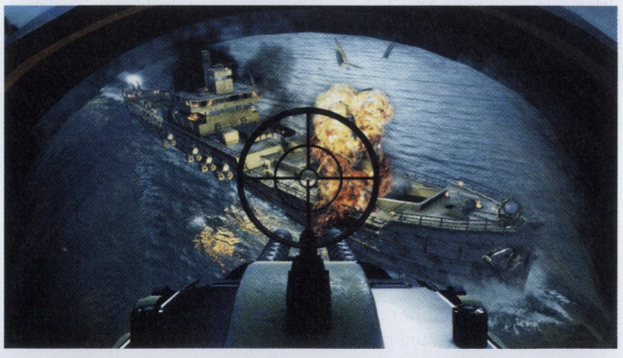
DEVELOPER:
Treyarch

DUE:
November 12

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some multi-player scenarios.

> **You are given the choice to either gun down the unarmed men or allow the soldiers to torch them with Molotov cocktails**



Need more Band of Brothers, seriously

Gears of War 2

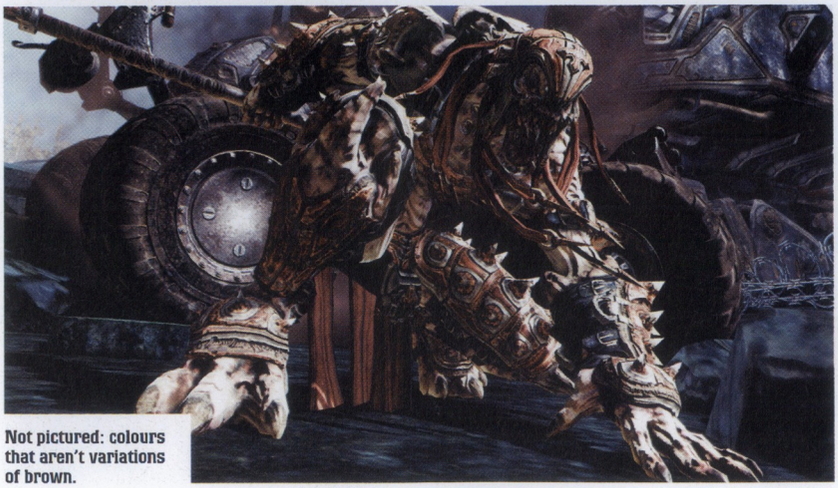
Epic has made some great games over the years – Jazz Jackrabbit, the Unreal Tournament franchise and Gears of War – but they are also responsible for one of the most frustrating trends in gaming today. Before Gears of War, games had colour. Now, thanks to the huge success of the third-person-shooter, every new game that comes out seems to suffer from the same "mature gaming means it has to be brown" curse. If Gears of War 2 is a success then things aren't really going to change all that much – even though there are flashes of colour, the game is still very brown. We recently had a chance to get some hands on time with Gears of War 2 and we have to say that the experience wasn't the most edifying one we've had. What we played for the most part seemed very much like the original game – not that that is necessarily a bad thing – and aside from a few moments we really didn't get to see anything particularly new. As soon as we got to anything that would more ably describe the Gears of War 2 experience the demo was stopped.

Still, there was one section of a mission we played that showed that there could be something really special in store for players. The mission objective involved escorting a slow moving vehicle through a Locust infested tunnel. Small skittering, exploding creatures threaten the player, the squad and the vehicle at every step. What made this escort mission (and it is an escort mission) so interesting? Well, the tunnel itself was pitch black, the only light available came from the trailing vehicle, backlighting everything with harsh floodlights. The overall visual effect made it look as though Frank Miller had drawn Gears of War – everything was rendered almost black and white by the harsh lighting and negative space did more to highlight figures and movement than actual colour. In gameplay terms the mission was little more than a simple shooting gallery, killing waves of creatures as they swarmed from the impenetrable darkness, but having to watch the darkness eagle-eyed for any sign of movement – a flash of light reflecting off a chitinous leg, for example – was pretty damn cool.

For the most part the action of the missions we played followed the tried and true "stop and pop" gunplay mechanics that worked so well in the original game, with the player having to use cover to advance and gain position on targets. The mechanic still works well. From what we've seen there seems to be a little more focus on big scripted events to push the action along, but aside from that it really does seem to be business as usual.

Now some of you may think that we're nitpicking and that it sounds as though we think that developers should reinvent the wheel for sequels. This is not at all the case. What we played looked good but as an experience we couldn't really point to anything different from the original game. «

See what we mean about the brown?



Not pictured: colours that aren't variations of brown.

HANDS-ON

SYSTEM: 360

CATEGORY: Third Person Shooter

PLAYERS: 1-16

DEVELOPER: Epic

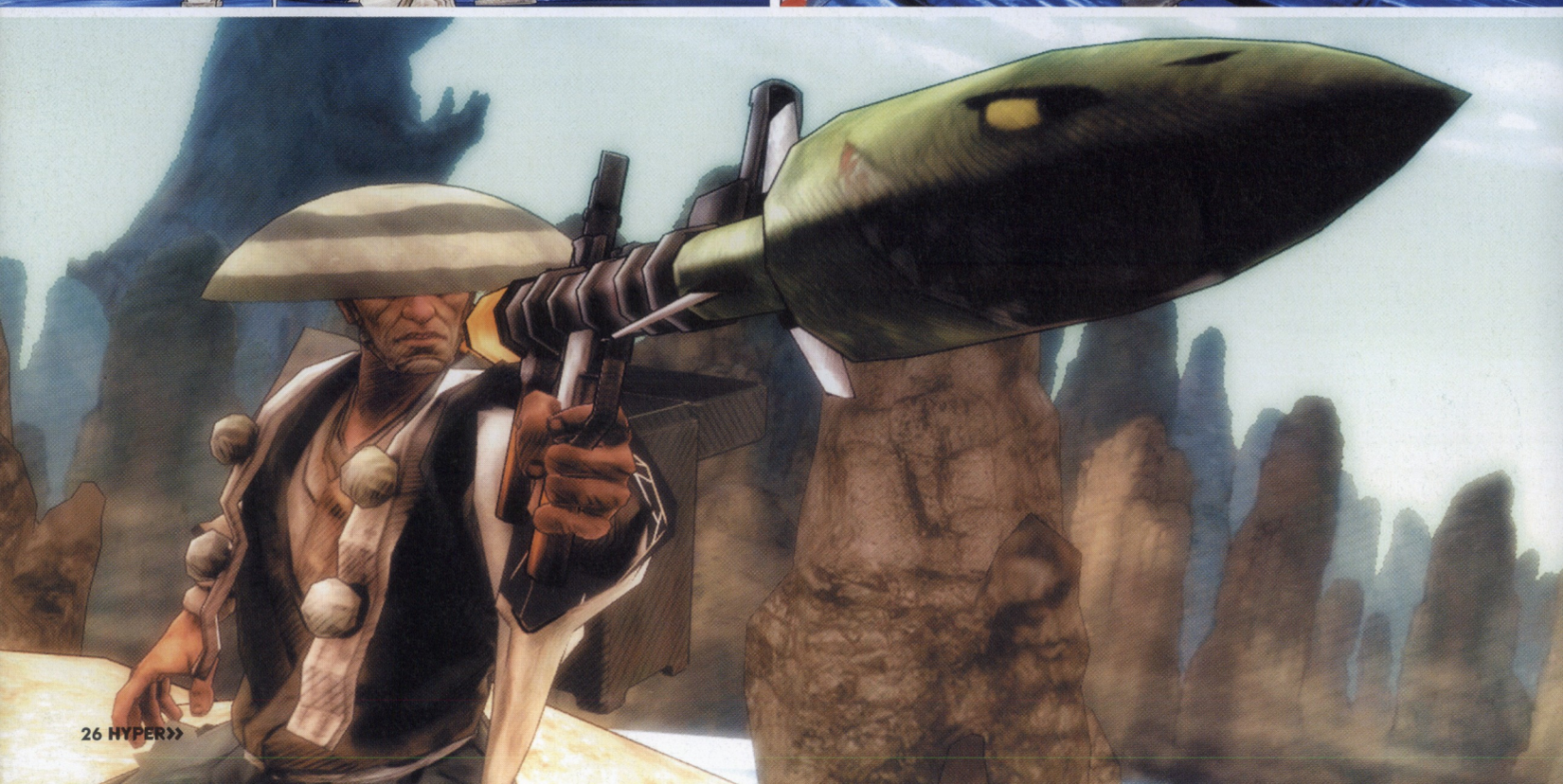
DUE: November

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some different gameplay. Some indication of the new story. Colour.

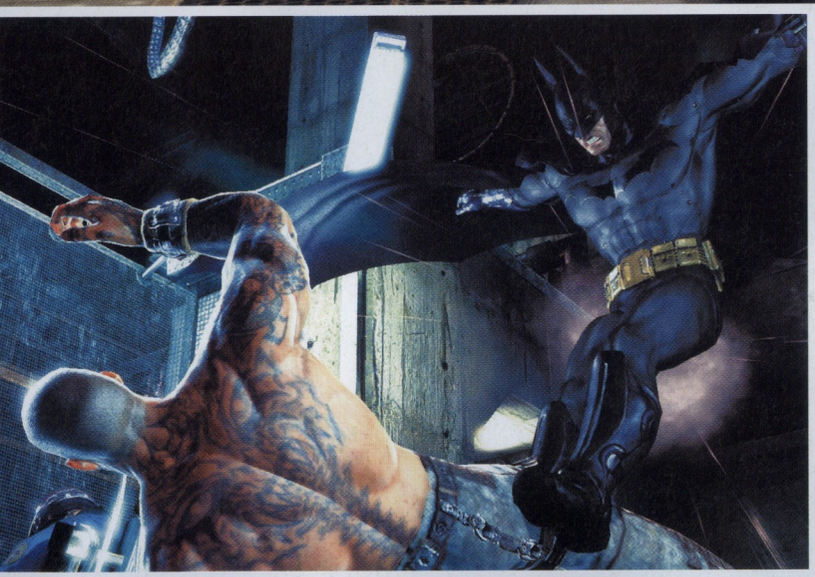
AFRO SAMURAI

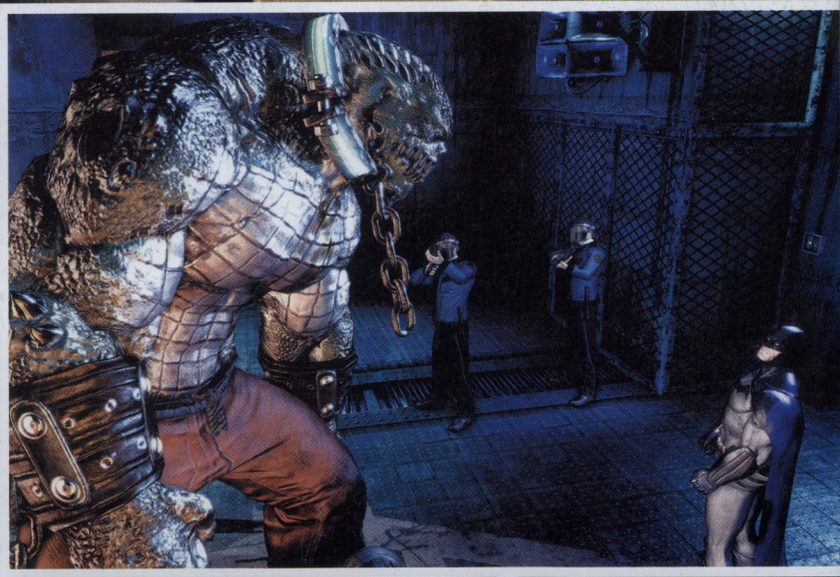
SYSTEM: Xbox 360/PS3
DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai
DUE: Q1 2009

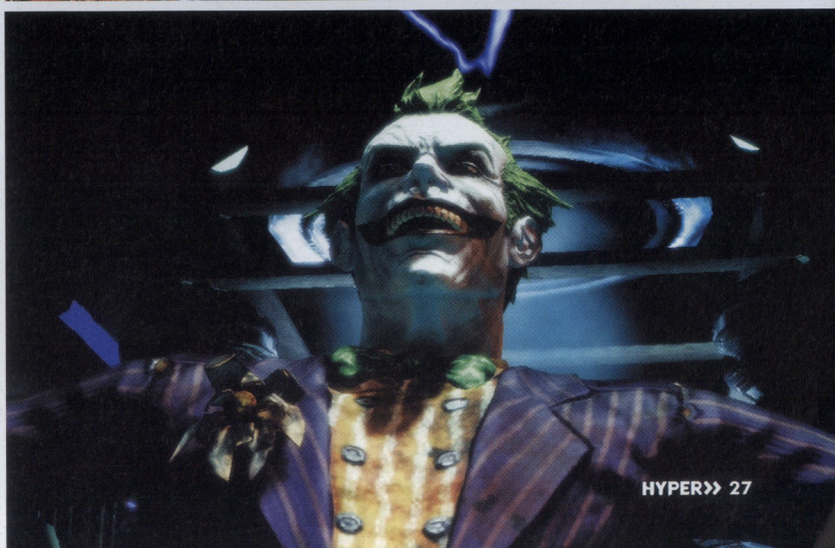


BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

SYSTEM: Xbox 360/PS3/PC
DEVELOPER: Rocksteady Studios
DUE: 2009







W

Wrath OF THE LICH KING

Due to this writing, **Papadoc** is immune to physical attacks for eight seconds

Before we get too comfortable, I should make it quite clear that this is a 'last look at the beta' rather than a 'review of the retail version of the game.' While it's unlikely that the major game mechanics will change between now and release, it is a dim possibility. By the same token, talents and spells are still undergoing constant revision in a last ditch attempt to balance everything before the big day.

With that small caveat in mind, let's hop into Northrend and see what all the fuss is about, shall we?

Blizzard learnt some important lessons from the Burning Crusade, particularly when it came to zone traffic and congestion at the lower levels. This time round, there are two start zones, in the Borean Tundra and Howling Fjord. Shuttle services exist between the zones as well as leading back to old world capitals for easy access to the auction house and class trainers.

> LET'S HOP INTO NORTHREND AND SEE WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT, SHALL WE?

DING!

Levelling works much the same as it always has. Complete quests to gain experience and upgrade your gear as you make your way to 80. There is a lot more variety now than there has been, however, and it certainly feels like less of a grind. It still takes a considerable amount of time to gain a level and it would be nice to see the next expansion offer, say, 20 levels to the cap but with less XP needed to gain a level, just to give the illusion of faster progression. But we get ahead of ourselves, of course.

One reason why it doesn't feel like such a grind is the new and improved look of the game. It's still the same engine as the Burning Crusade, but the developers have tweaked it to the max, resulting in a truly awe-inspiring new continent. Everything from the flowers to the trees to the bloody great Wrath Gate look incredible. The Gate is so huge you need to fly halfway to Azeroth just to fit it on screen! It's bigger than Wilks' waistline!

There are also lots of floating areas to explore, although these are not always accessible until you've learnt the new 'Cold Weather Flying' skill, which lets you tear around the skies of Northrend on one of the new flying mounts available. Once trained up, you can sneak into Naxxramas, or pay a visit to the faction specific airships carving a lazy path through the airspace above Ice Crown Glacier.

In the Burning Crusade life really began at 70. After the trawl through the Outlands for XP, rep, honour and glory was over a whole new world of content slowly opened up, from the heroic dungeons to Karazhan, Gruuls Lair and beyond, eventually, to Mount Hyjal and the Black Temple. Zul'Aman and Sunwell Plateau were added more recently, to tie up loose ends in the story and give the hardcore something to do with their itchy fingers.

The same is true of WotLK, although on a much grander scale. Where BC had a handful of 25-man raids and only two 10-mans, WotLK offers every instance in both 10 and 25-man flavours. It's such a simple, elegant solution that it's hard to know where to start.

First off, the instances do not share a raid ID, so there is no need to worry about being locked out of the epic 25-man run just because you had a quick jaunt through the 10-man.

TIERS IN YOUR EYES

The tier loot available works cross-instance, so the set bonuses apply whether you have the 10-man or the higher quality 25-man kit. This is a godsend for classes with popular tokens, as it means set bonuses can be unlocked far quicker than previously.

Certain die-hard fans have got the hump with Blizzard for turning Naxxramas from a high-end pig of an instance into the new starter instance for raid groups. Frankly, only a handful of people ever got to see inside of the place first time round and that was a crying shame. Naxx Mark 1 was Blizzard's crowning glory so far as raid content goes. Retuning it for 10 and 25 man raids is a real stroke of genius. Trash packs aren't so tedious any more and the bosses have been cleverly reworked to remain true to the spirit of each encounter, even if the mechanics are subtly – or glaringly – different.

Running through Naxxramas a few times in both sizes it was clear that the developers put a lot of time and effort into balancing the encounters. The 10 man has been designed in such a way that class-specific encounters in the 25-man, such as Instructor Rasuvious (or however you spell it) have different mechanics to allow for a more flexible group makeup. Fights such as the four horsemen are broadly similar to the old 40-man encounters, but have been retuned to match the composition of the smaller raid groups. It works extremely well and it's nice to know that more people will experience the inside of Kel'Thuzad's necropolis.

In an effort to make raiding less of a chore, Blizzard has also tweaked the mechanics of several essential raid elements. Group buffs such as Power Word: Fortitude now instantly buff the entire raid, rather than one party at a time. A small tweak, perhaps, but it should save valuable time getting the gang fighting fit after a wipe.

There are more ways to regain mana now. Shadow Priests return less mana with Vampiric Touch, but are now able to regenerate raid-wide, resulting in a net gain to the raid. Hunters and Mages are both able to return mana to the raid and between these three classes groups 'should' be better off than in BC.

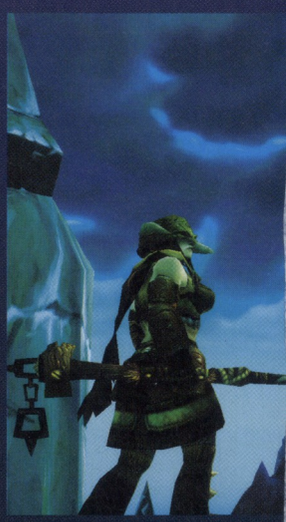
> GROUP BUFFS SUCH AS POWER WORD: FORTITUDE NOW INSTANTLY BUFF THE ENTIRE RAID

GANKING LOWIES

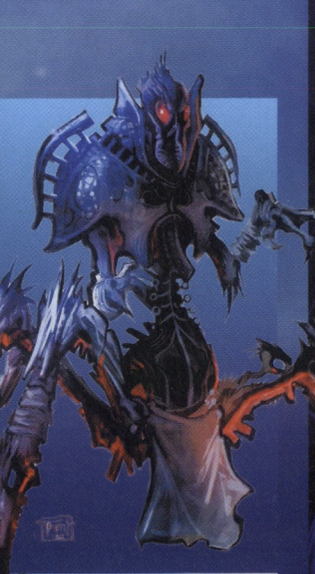
PVP has been given the once over too, with new arenas and battlegrounds being introduced. Strand of the Ancients, located off the Southern coast of Dragonblight, offers an entirely new Battleground experience, with both factions fighting in a scenario that has strong echoes of a D-Day landing to it. Each faction is assigned variously to attack or defence and must make use of five siege weapons to smash their walls and breach the third wall before the opposition. The Flying Machine takes full advantage of the new vehicle mechanics, but the most entertaining weapon is, for us at least, the Goblin Shredder. After killing shredders in the Dead Mines and at the Warsong Lumber Mill, it's great to finally get a taste of life on the other side. It is primarily an anti-air vehicle, although the saw-blades can double up as potent melee weapons if a foolish gnome wanders too close. The Shredder also has a rocket boot effect allowing players to jump walls and other obstacles.

The two new arenas also offer exciting new changes over those in BC. Orgrimmar arena is on a larger scale than we're used to, and allows the use of mounts. It also has moving pillars that block line of sight and serve as a handy escape from melee classes. Dalaran arena is different again, and takes place in the sewers of Dalaran. For some reason, this gives a distinct 'Fight Club' feel, even though fights are more about Ice Blocks and crowd control than they are bare knuckle slug-fests.

It's not easy being green



Superman gets a new pet for the Fortress of Solitude



Is this Diablo III or WoW? I can't tell any more.

While there are no new playable races in the Lich King, there are plenty of new NPC races, such as the Wilford Brimley-alikes the Tuskar, and the angry Swedish Rock gods, the Vrykul. Very interesting, I hear you say, but what about the Death Knights! Bloody impatient you are!

THE OTHER DK

Any race can play a DK and once you've finished with the character customisation, you start off in an instanced version of Ebon Hold. The quest chain is thoroughly enjoyable and gives an excellent grounding in the basics. It's also essential, as you start with no spare talent points. Completing quests unlock talent points and steer you inexorably towards a final confrontation with...well, some of the key players in WoW lore.

The DK is a thoroughly entertaining class, with some excellent new spell mechanics that promise much more than simple novelty value. The problem is, servers are likely to be flooded with the buggers for a good couple of months after release. Expect to see plenty of Gnome Death Knights whining about not being able to get into raids and instances well into the New Year.

The release of Patch 3.0 prior to the expansion going live is intended to introduce some key Lich King content ahead of time to 'smooth the transition' and, presumably, help hold onto people considering a defection to Warhammer Online. Inscriptions, changes to Hunter pets and talents, guild calendars and the two new arenas all make it into the wild in advance, giving the rest of the population a chance to get a taste of the things to come.

We'll be reviewing the expansion in greater detail once it's gone live and had a chance to settle down. Until then, enjoy the patch, save your pennies for the x-pack and brush up on your lore! wOot! «

HYPER AT TOKYO GAME SHOW

SPECIAL REPORT

東京ゲームショウ

A later start this year meant that we didn't need to journey to Tokyo until early October – result: lower humidity and less clamminess, which was good news all-round. And even better news: we found TGS putting on one of its strongest performances in recent memory, with virtually every publisher/developer present pulling its weight and showing off at least one game worth talking about.

Words and photos by Jonti Davies

FINAL FANTASY XIII EXPOSED

We've had to put up with only seeing glimpses of Final Fantasy XIII and Versus Final Fantasy XIII since the games were first announced, and this year's TGS showing by Square Enix was no different in that regard. A SquEnix rep we spoke to at the show apologised for this (which was very decent of him, considering it's not his fault) and was keen to point out that even the teams working on the games are now beginning to feel that perhaps they went public too soon, announcing FFXIII earlier than was wise. Either way, work continues and if all goes to plan we'll be playing some tangible code by the time TGS 2009 rolls around. In the meantime, feast your retinas on these new screens from the TGS 2008 show-reel. (XIII above, Versus below)

Much of the pre-TGS hype was centred on the clash of console titans Microsoft and Sony. Microsoft had at last made inroads into Japan's slightly introverted game-scene through a series of clever ideas (specifically: cutting the 360 hardware's price, running with a new ad campaign, and getting into bed with Square Enix) and Sony's PS3 was being outsold by the humble PS2. However, there was no real sense of Microsoft-Sony antagonism on the show floor – both the 360 and PS3 had their own exclusives on show, but there was also a ***lot*** of crossover material on display and neither system came out of TGS as the clear "winner".

If anything, handheld games were (again) the biggest successes at TGS. Nintendo itself didn't attend the show – although Shigeru Miyamoto was seen receiving another award at a TGS sideshow, possibly for being the global game industry's best banjo player or something. There were, however, millions of third-party DS games playable. Many of those titles were of little interest to game-loving journos like us (you know the sort of thing: ***Daily Crochet Training & My Woolly Jumper Diary: Sew It Yourself!***), but panning the waters of TGS revealed some nuggets of gaming gold nestled among the mass-market silt.

SEGA arguably had the richest reserves of DS software. There was PlatinumGames' ***Infinite Space*** (see our hands-on impressions elsewhere this issue); refined strategy in ***Shining Force Feather***; ***7th*** Dragon, a pretty new RPG from the director of ***Skies of Arcadia***; and the multiplayer-oriented ***Phantasy Star Zero***, which picks up where the PSP's massively popular ***Phantasy Star Portable*** left off. Square Enix also did its bit for the DS cause, with ***Valkyrie Profile DS***, the DS remake of ***Chrono Trigger***, and ***Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days*** all impressing. (Square Enix' ***Dragon Quest IX***, which will probably sell at least three million copies when it debuts in Japan early next year, was conspicuous only by its absence.) Konami also came up trumps, with the traditionalist delights of ***Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia*** and ***Genso Suikoden Tiekries***, a new game in the cult favourite RPG series. Taito presented ***Gardening Mama*** in playable form, too, which catered nicely for all the mothers and daughters attending TGS' public open days (OK, confession: even we had fun with ***Gardening Mama***).

[above] The walk up to the Makuhari Messe's entrance is eased by the presence of an escalator. That giant inflatable superhero was there to promote anti-virus software. Exciting!

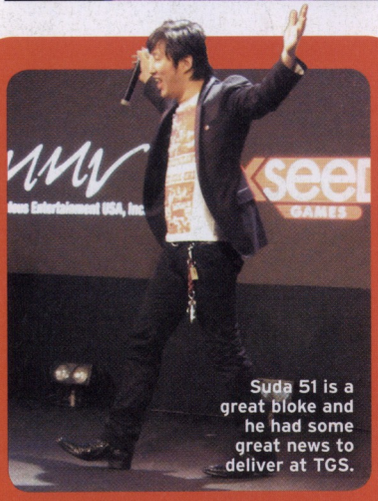
Obviously with Nintendo away from the action over TGS Weekend, there was no chance that any first-party DSi software would be on show, but we had hoped for some DSi-specific stuff from third-party developers. It wasn't to be. As there were no such titles on show – no games running on DSi hardware, and only Lites as far as the eye could see – it appears that

there was no chance that any first-party DSi software would be on show

Social gaming at its finest...

[above] Parasite Eve is reborn on the PSP as The 3rd Birthday, which looks like something out of Kill Bill.

[above] Tokyo Game Show puts a lot of emphasis on the 'Show' bit of its title. On the two days when TGS is open to the public, you can catch a concert and play games. Trouble is, you probably won't know who the artists are.



Suda 51 is a great bloke and he had some great news to deliver at TGS.

SUDA 51 ANNOUNCES NO MORE HEROES 2

This was arguably the best bit of TGS news for Wii owners and for people who care about Suda 51's distinctively deadpan game humour. Suda 51 took to the stage at a Marvelous Entertainment Overseas Media Event during TGS, and we got to see a brief trailer of No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle, aka No More Heroes 2, with the first game's protagonist, Travis Touchdown, making a welcome return and finding himself in a confrontation atop a skyscraper. Apparently the game won't be ready for release until the beginning of 2010, but if it's as good as (or better than) the first No More Heroes, we'll gladly mow lawns for the right to play it.

Japanese developers either hadn't had enough time to get their camera-utilising projects to a playable state, ***or*** that Nintendo wanted everyone to wait before showing off their DSi wares.

The PSP, meanwhile, which has enjoyed a full 12 months of sustained success in this part of the world, was supported at TGS by strong first- and third-party software alike. Sony had ***LocoRoco 2*** and ***Patapon 2*** playable. Square Enix revealed ***The 3rd Birthday***, an interesting-looking PSP quasi-sequel to ***Parasite Eve***, and it also had the excellent ***Dissidia: Final Fantasy*** playable at its booth (see our ***Dissidia*** preview). Elsewhere, Namco Bandai showed off a new PSP ***Macross*** game that went down very well with the locals, as well as a portable ***Idolm@ster*** game for Japan's legions of J-pop/idol fans.

Still, Capcom's ***Monster Hunter*** games have been some of the biggest phenomena in Japanese gaming over the past two years, and Sony probably realises that were it not for the multi-million-selling ***Monster Hunter Portable*** games, the PSP would never have experienced such an unlikely resurgence in popularity. So it was interesting (and a bit alarming, no doubt, from Sony's perspective) to find that Capcom didn't have a new PSP ***Monster Hunter*** game to reveal at TGS. Instead, it was putting most of its energy into promoting ***Monster Hunter Tri***, which is a Wii exclusive.

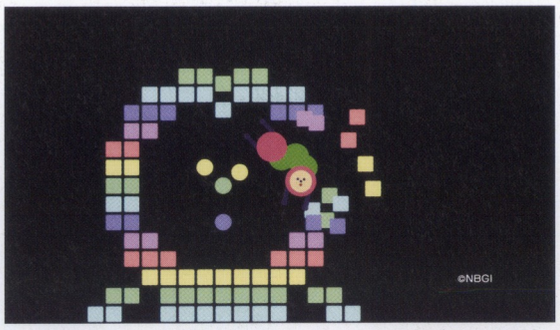
[below] Where does Miyamoto keep all his awards?

Aside from ***Monster Hunter 3*** and the prospect of ***No More Heroes 2*** (see boxout), the Wii was also blessed at TGS with innovation from Yuji Naka's Prope outfit in the shape of a bizarre but wonderful game called ***Let's Tap!***, which cleverly bypasses any need to even touch the Wii Remote (see our ***Let's Tap!*** preview for more details). Also on Wii, Marvelous Entertainment's ***Muramasa*** was the prettiest thing we've seen in 2D since ***Odin Sphere***, a glorious hand-drawn journey through Japanese history — and it turns out the two games share the same developer (so that explains it). Elsewhere, Namco Bandai also put in a great show of Wii support, with ***Klonoa: Door to Phantomile*** reminding us why we loved the old ***Klonoa*** PlayStation games, ***Sky Crawlers*** managing to deliver a worthy Wii flight sim, and ***Wii Ski & Snowboard*** building on the Balance Board antics of ***Family Ski***. Konami's ***Castelvania Judgment*** was interesting, too — probably the most gothic 3D beat 'em up since Morrigan showed up in ***Darkstalkers***.

Back in Sony territory, the PS3 benefited from Square Enix' pledges of future support via ***Final Fantasy XIII*** videos (see boxout), but Microsoft had the advantage in terms of playable SquEnix stuff, with ***Star Ocean 4*** and ***The Last Remnant*** booth appearing exclusively at Microsoft's booth and attracting lengthy queues. Then again, Level-5 demoed ***White Knight Chronicles*** at Sony's booth (the game will be released in Japan before the end of 2008 and looked virtually complete at TGS), so there's still some kind of JRPG equilibrium between PS3 and Xbox 360.

In the beat 'em up arena, too, the Sony and Microsoft consoles were tied after several rounds: ***Street Fighter IV*** was playable on both machines, with not much to choose between the two versions, and Microsoft announced at a TGS conference that next year's ***Tekken 6*** would be coming to the 360 (as well as the PS3, of course). Meanwhile, the most popular game at this year's TGS was ***Resident Evil 5*** — another PS3/360 simul-release.

Of the single-format titles on show, Tecmo's announcement of the PS3-exclusive third-person shooter ***Quantum Theory*** seemed to indicate that the ***DoA*** developer might be realigning its



HOW'S THE FOOD AT TGS?

Pretty good, since you ask. Down the road from the Makuhari Messe venue for TGS you can find an Outback Steakhouse, and there are also plenty of Japanese-style eateries within walking distance of the show. If you can't be arsed to leave the venue for lunch, there's a sprawling, cheap-and-dirty (but tasty) food court area in a hall adjacent to where all the games are being exhibited. Curry, noodles, fried octopus in batter... it's all here.

[above left] **Is this the future of Tecmo? Quantum Theory was announced at TGS as a PS3 exclusive with a "romantic art nouveau" visual style. Hmm...**

[above] **PSN games such as Keita Takahashi's Noby Noby Boy gave some extra spark to Sony's TGS.**

allegiances after falling out with noted Xbox supporter Tomonobu Itagaki. It's only 30% complete, but ***Quantum Theory*** looked quite promising in a typically 'stupid fun' Tecmo kind of way.

Over on Microsoft's TGS stand, a 360-exclusive game by From Software (the ***Armored Core*** people) was turning heads. ***Ninja Blade*** is remarkably similar to Tecmo's ***Ninja Gaiden*** in some ways – particularly the speed of the action and, obviously, the ninja protagonist. (But you should probably check our preview for the full explanation...) Apart from ***The Last Remnant*** and ***Star Ocean 4*** (which combined took up about a third of Microsoft's booth area), there was a good mix of 360 titles from Japan and from the West, mostly contributed by third-party developers. The likes of ***Fable 2***, ***Mirror's Edge*** and ***Fallout 3*** offered a nice foil for upcoming Japanese games such as ***Street Fighter IV***, ***Sonic Unleashed*** and ***Resident Evil 5***.

Sony went for a similar approach, packing its stand with Western and Japanese games in almost equal measure. Inevitably, though, the local produce attracted more interest from the Japanese media and public – on this showing, we can't envisage ***LittleBigPlanet*** doing great business in Japan, but ***Winning Eleven 2009*** and ***Yakuza 3*** (for example) probably will. The first-party titles at Sony's booth included the excellent ***Resistance 2*** and ***Motorstorm 2***, as well as a frankly uninspired new ***DMC*** rip-off in ***Demon's Souls***. ***PlayStation Home*** was also demoed, but its Western style seemed to leave most Japanese attendees cold. It would have been nice if Sony had shown us something of the REAL ***Gran Turismo 5***, perhaps, but instead all we got was a discouraging indication that SCEI will continue to milk ***Prologue*** for some time yet, with the awkwardly named ***Gran Turismo 5 Prologue Spec III*** merely adding a handful of new cars to the latest build of the game (or demo, if you prefer).

PlayStation Home was also demoed, but its Western style seemed to leave most Japanese attendees cold

Sony's PSN showing was particularly strong, though. ***Flower*** was a joy to play, as was a new SCEI puzzle game by the name of ***Gomibako*** (which means 'rubbish bin' in English) that uses rubbish disposal as its unlikely theme for an addicting stack 'em up-type style of game. And it was great to at last see ***Noby Noby Boy***, the new PSN creation from Keita 'Mr. Katamari Damacy' Takahashi, which was present in bafflingly brief video form and left us begging Namco Bandai's reps for a playtest.

As for conclusions that can be drawn from this year's Tokyo Game Show, we'd say it's clear that both PS3 and Xbox 360 are in with a fighting chance... of finishing second in Japan. More so than in previous years, Japan's third-party developers and publishers seem to be embracing the Wii and channelling more of their new projects in Nintendo's direction. It's also fair to say that Japanese RPGs – across all formats; home and portable consoles – are making a big comeback in Japan. With the state of the global economy, it's obviously difficult to predict anything with certainty, but at TGS 2008 (at least) Japan's videogame market looked healthy

[top] **Square Enix' Star Ocean 4 was easily the most popular game playable at Microsoft's booth.**

[above] **Microsoft's announcement that Tekken 6 was 360-bound only confirmed what we'd already been suspecting.**

PSP ON THE UP

The PSP was boosted by Sony's announcement at a press conference on the Friday lunchtime of TGS that all future first-party PSP games (including imminent releases such as LocoRoco 2 and Patapon 2, both of which were playable at TGS and left us impressed) would be available in Japan as digital downloads as well as in physical UMD form. Plus, the downloadable versions of these games will be a full 1,000yen cheaper than their antiquated UMD equivalents, and Japanese PSP users will be able to access them via the PSP's own new version of the PlayStation Store. In practice, all this means that Japan's 10 million-plus PSP owners will be more likely than ever to ditch UMD games in favour of downloads, and also that they'll be stocking up on Memory Sticks for storage. Funny thing: Sony has a hand in manufacturing those Sticks-of-Memory...

DISSIDIA: FINAL FANTASY

● *Crisis Core* proved that Square Enix could do new things with *Final Fantasy* on the PSP – and without messing up. From our time in its company at TGS, *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* seems to add another positive angle to that line of thinking: this is a 3D beat 'em up of sorts, starring your favourite *FF* characters (including Cloud, Squall, Zidane and Sephiroth), and it's one of the prettiest PSP titles out of Japan since... well, *Crisis Core*.

Cleverly, instead of just making a straight fighter featuring *FF* combatants, Square Enix reworks the genre with *Dissidia* to find its own space where RPG elements and beat 'em up staples collide. Battles are fought in open 3D arenas that are full of natural hazards, which you need to avoid while playing. And *Dissidia* gives you full control over your character's movement through these environments, so in that sense it's a bit like Capcom's *Power Stone* games.

Each stage provides access to area-specific special attacks, and it's important to make use of these because they're generally more effective than attacks in characters' default repertoires. Summons are possible in the middle of battle, again feeding off *Final Fantasy*'s RPG roots, and you're even given a HP bar (instead of a standard beat 'em up energy gauge), which will be depleted by incoming attacks but can also be replenished with magic. There's room for progress, too, with the victorious fighter at the end of each battle receiving a level-up to better equip him/her for the fights ahead. Two-player wi-fi matches are promised, and we'll be able to put those to the test as soon as December, when *Dissidia* launches in Japan.

There are far too many Final Fantasy games being developed - we count at least four

SYSTEM: PSP / **CATEGORY:** BEAT 'EM UP / **PLAYERS:** 1-2
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX / **DUE:** DECEMBER 18 (JAPAN), TBC (AUSTRALIA)

Seriously, you play a petal and float about on the wind, trying to hook up with other petals and wind-bourne dtritus

FLOWER

● If SixAxis motion controls are a bad idea that should be swept under the Welcome mat outside Sony Towers, well, no one told thatgamecompany. The concept behind *Flower* is beautifully simple (oh, and it's simply beautiful to look at): just tilting the SixAxis/Dual Shock 3 sends your petal flying through a springtime field full of shrubs, grasses and other flora. Guide it towards other loose, floating scraps of floral material and your organic avatar will grow and change. Collect every last scrap from an area and you'll be transferred to the next environment.

Sony reckons *Flower* in its TGS build is only 60% complete,

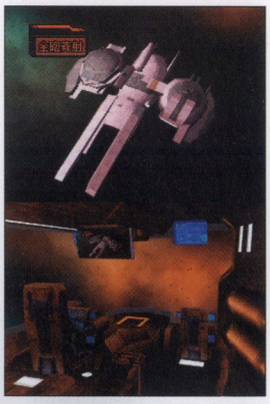
> **When you tilt the controller forwards, it's surprising how much speed you can gain**

but it feels like it's almost there. When you tilt the controller forwards, it's surprising how much speed you can gain – and in combination with the game's 60fps refresh rate this results in a great sense that you're actually flying. In that way, *Flower* is the most floaty, gravity-defying experience since the hang-glider stages of *Pilotwings 64*. Butterflies in the stomach stuff, really.

The only potential crash landing here might be caused by a lack of variety, as the TGS demo gave no indication of how the game would change beyond the first couple of levels. Provided thatgamecompany can keep things fresh from start to finish, though, *Flower* will likely be one of the best PSN releases of 2009.

SYSTEM: PS3 / **CATEGORY:** POLLINATION / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: THATGAMECOMPANY / **DUE:** 2009

INFINITE SPACE

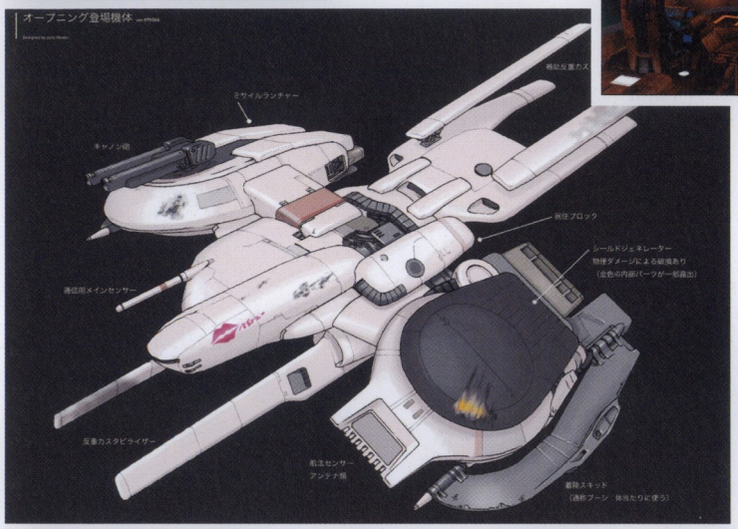


Here's hoping that this very promising looking DS space strategy makes it's way to the West

● PlatinumGames' *Infinite Space* was the most distinguished DS game at TGS, full stop. It's helped by the appeal of its visual style and unusual theme (there are plenty of space exploration games on the PC, but hardly any on Nintendo's handheld), although that's by no means the extent of its merits. The TGS demo version of *Infinite Space* was playable inside a pitch-black closed space (ironic, that) and each DS Lite was equipped with high-spec headphones to help convey the full drama of the game's intergalactic setting.

Purely based on playtime with the TGS build, it seems that *Infinite Space* is roughly an equal split between exploration/build-up and ship-versus-ship battles. The preamble uses a surprising number of cutscenes to establish the situation, and these are among the most dramatic animated sequences we've seen running on DS hardware. Once a battle commences, the top screen is reserved for attack animations (these also look awesome) while the touchscreen switches to a dashboard via which you can control your ship's position, select attacks and defensive items, and plan your route to victory. Battles are turn-based, so you do have some room for movement and time for strategy, and they end up playing out like the inter-spaceship confrontations in *Star Trek*.

Infinite Space will debut in Japan next spring and the final game will feature a two-player wi-fi mode for inter-player battles. We hope the music in the TGS demo is indicative of what we can expect from the finished production – it's the most stirring thing we heard at TGS, on any console.



SYSTEM: DS / **CATEGORY:** RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1-2
DEVELOPER: PLATINUMGAMES / **DUE:** EARLY 2009 (JAPAN), TBC (AUSTRALIA)

GOMIBAKO

● It's not an obvious connection, but we were instantly reminded of *Blast Corps* on the N64 when we played Sony's *Gomibako* at TGS. As the Japanese press release puts it, you need to "Save the earth by cleaning out the overflowed [sic] rubbish around the world!" It's a noble premise for a puzzle game, and *Gomibako* proves to be explosive and destructive (which is probably where the *Blast Corps* flashback came from) as you work to dispose of junk by slamming it down into the bin. Any accumulated rubbish below is compacted according to what you drop and how much force you put into the dropping action.

Gomibako gets really interesting when you drop hot items such as lit cigarettes on top of combustible bric-a-brac, sparking chains of explosions and ultimately incinerating your collected rubbish en bloc. You can rack up score multipliers using this method, and doing so also accelerates the arrival of mini-boss challenges where you need to get rid of an oversized bit of junk without quite filling your rubbish bin to the brim.

Apparently there's only a single-player mode in offline play, but as *Gomibako* is a puzzle game on PSN there's every chance an online versus mode will appear in the code before it's released at the turn of 2009. The *Gomibako* title (Japanese for 'rubbish bin') is only tentative, so keep your eye out for a game that looks like this one but under a different name. Satisfyingly explosive puzzle games like *Gomibako* are pretty rare.

The idea of Junk Tetris really does have a certain appeal

SYSTEM: PS3 (PSN) / **CATEGORY:** PUZZLE
PLAYERS: 1 / **DEVELOPER:** SCEI / **DUE:** TBC

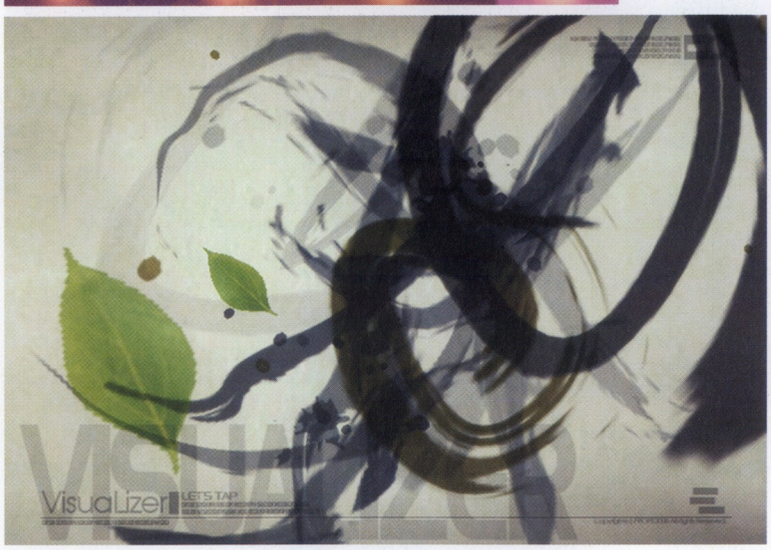
LET'S TAP!

● In the end, you can always rely on Yuji Naka to produce something special. We were a bit worried when he established Prope (after leaving Sonic Team) that Naka-san might go the way of Yu Suzuki, becoming an unfairly marginalised figure. If anything, his independence from SEGA seems to have renewed his creativity, and the team he's assembled at Prope is clearly more than capable of putting together some very novel software.

All you need in order to play Prope's debut production – *Let's Tap!* – is a Wii Remote and a cardboard box, and you don't even touch the Remote during play. This essentially appears to be an assortment of mini-games designed to test the limits of a control system that frees you from the need to grip or press anything: just tapping your fingers like an idle shopkeeper is enough to convey rhythm, speed and direction via reverberations to the Remote.

As well as single- and multiplayer challenges (for up to four players), *Let's Tap!* includes a Visualiser Mode that puts the tap-tap-tap control mechanic to use in a more laid-back setting. Here, you can tap your fingers to draw calligraphy, control firework displays and so on. If you enjoyed *Electroplankton* or any light synthesiser-type software, this aspect of *Let's Tap!* will definitely appeal. A companion game, *Let's Catch!*, is due out on WiiWare in Japan at the same time as *Let's Tap!* hits the shops. Both titles will likely arrive in Australia next year, because of the Yuji Naka connection if nothing else – although the innovative control setup should turn plenty of heads, as well.

Just how annoying four people banging on boxes in multi-player will be is yet to be seen



SYSTEM: Wii / **CATEGORY:** ACTION / **PLAYERS:** 1-4
DEVELOPER: PROPE / **DUE:** DECEMBER (JAPAN), TBC (AUSTRALIA)

More of the Monster Hunting you love, now with more waggle!

MONSTER HUNTER 3

● The significance of Capcom's decision to bring *Monster Hunter Tri* (or *3*) to the Wii rather than press ahead with development on the PS3, as most people in Japan had expected, is on a par with Square Enix' decision to produce *Dragon Quest IX* as a DS exclusive. Both are juggernauts that could have a huge bearing on the success of their respective formats, and it's tempting (although a tad simplistic) to see Wii and DS as being certain to dominate the Japanese games market for some years on the back of *MH3* and *DQIX*.

Inevitably, the queues for playtime with *Monster Hunter 3* at TGS were a few hours long at the best of times, and it was funny but reassuring to see people's reaction to the game when they were finally granted a go: most looked transfixed, as though they'd been spirited away to a distant but familiar second home. For a Wii game, *Monster Hunter 3* looks incredible – the TGS demo's underwater area, in particular, is a step ahead of *Endless Ocean* or any other Wii attempt at drawing seas. *MH3* uses the Remote and Nunchuk in slightly ham-fisted ways, with Wii shakes for attacks, but the final game will also offer support for the Classic Controller and there's still time for Capcom to refine its Remote controls.

Most important is that this is more of the same stuff Japanese gamers *love*, and (although it wasn't possible to test this aspect at TGS) the game will live by its online multiplayer action. For Japan, there isn't a bigger third-party game coming to the Wii next year.

SYSTEM: Wii / **CATEGORY:** RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM / **DUE:** EARLY 2009 (JAPAN), TBC (AUSTRALIA)

NINJA BLADE

● Who'd have thought that From Software would have one of the most interesting games at TGS 2008? The Tokyo developer is renowned for its consistency, and generally its output is of a decent quality, but *Ninja Blade* marks a radical change of pace. Controlling a ninja in a futuristic Tokyo that's over-run by all sorts of mutated nasties, things quickly take a *Ninja Gaiden* twist here (i.e., you wave a sword to cut swathes through enemy groups). That's not the only twist, though, as the action suddenly takes a *Shenmue* trip through Quick Timer Events every time a cutscene begins. The way cutscenes and standard play are segued together is extraordinary, with no discernible loading times to warn you that a cutscene is in the offing.

An early scenario leaves you having defeated half a dozen mutants and overlooking a sheer drop from the top of a tower, where a broken window refracts the white light of Tokyo at night. Just as you think you have time to relax and enjoy the view, your character independently decides to jump out of the window and run down the side of the skyscraper. Even before he sets foot on the outer walls, you find yourself back in control momentarily as a button symbol flashes on screen; get it right in the single second of opportunity presented and you land successfully, before sprinting towards the ground. And that's when you find that waves of enemies are running *up* the building towards you. Phew. *Ninja Blade* left us breathless.

Button mashing - in the FUTURE!

SYSTEM: XBOX 360 / **CATEGORY:** ACTION / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** FROM SOFTWARE / **DUE:** SPRING 2009 (JAPAN), TBC (AUSTRALIA)

If the actress who plays Sheva couldn't get work locally because of her looks, there's something very wrong with Australia

RESIDENT EVIL 5

● Capcom's *Resident Evil 5* — or *Biohazard 5*, as it's known in Japan — went through a period of controversy and some doubting, but its TGS showing made it clear that the game had survived such problems and is on course to become a modern-day classic.

The biggest change in the playable TGS build was the option for some co-operative two-player action via networked consoles. It's fair to say this feature changes the direction of *Resident Evil* quite dramatically, putting more stall in mutual protection and strategic movement, as well as introducing the need for constructive communication. Playing alongside an AI-controlled Sheva or Chris doesn't feel quite as involving after experiencing *RE5* alongside a fellow mortal. Capcom also announced an offline split-screen version of the co-op mode for those who prefer closer

RE5 also features a revamped control system that enables you to strafe and aim independently

contact and don't mind playing with a diminished field of vision.

Resident Evil 5 also features a revamped control system that enables you to strafe and aim your weapon independently and simultaneously, using the left and right sticks in tandem. This makes the action feel quicker and is ultimately a more nimble setup, but traditionalists are permitted to stick with the *RE4* system if they get on better with that. On this showing, *Resident Evil 5*'s greatest strengths are in the choices it offers — although the stunning African environment, scary set-pieces and creepy action are all shining through as well. Inevitably, there's little if any difference between the 360 and PS3 versions of *RE5*.

SYSTEM: PS3/XBOX 360 / **CATEGORY:** SURVIVAL HORROR / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM / **DUE:** MARCH 2009

SKY CRAWLERS

Fingers crossed this works - we need a good flight combat game for the Wii

● *Sky Crawlers* is notable principally for three reasons: One, it's an anime film tie-in (and the film in question is a good 'un), two, it's a flight sim on Wii that doesn't suck and three, it's the work of Namco's crack *Ace Combat* development team. Playable at TGS and already on Japanese shop shelves by the time you read this, *Sky Crawlers* is full of good ideas which make the game user-friendly and, once you've got used to the controls, damn good fun.

Instead of doing the expected and assigning directional control to Wii Remote gestures, the game uses the Nunchuk's motion-sensing for that side of things (as well as for aiming your plane's guns) and turns the Remote into a utility device that looks after acceleration/braking (just tilt the Remote backwards/forwards), with special moves and mid-flight communications on the A and B buttons.

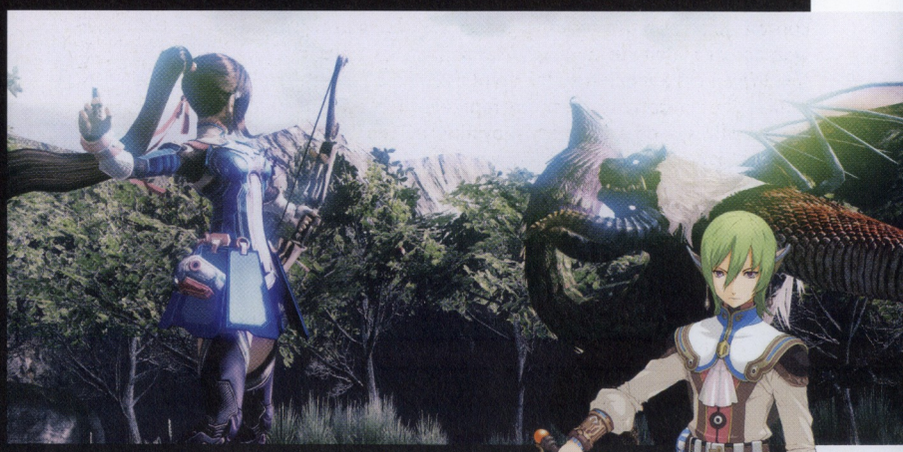
Namco's Japanese PR describes *Sky Crawlers* as "Dramatic Flight Shooting" – the action takes place during the alternative historical wartime (a *bit* like WWII) of the *Sky Crawlers* movie, and the drama comes from the game's progressive story. As well as shooting at enemy planes, you also get to take on fleets of naval ships and enemy fortresses. Interestingly, there are also photography-themed reconnaissance missions and a two-player co-op mode where Player Two acts as an auxiliary gunner. *Sky Crawlers* has convincing controls; it was also one of the prettiest Wii games at TGS. Look out for a local release once Sony releases the English dub of 'The Sky Crawlers' in cinemas early next year.

SYSTEM: Wii / **CATEGORY:** SHOOT 'EM UP / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO BANDAI / **DUE:** TBC

STAR OCEAN 4: THE LAST HOPE

● At TGS, Square Enix confirmed a February release for *Star Ocean 4* in Japan, followed by a March debut in the West. The timing of this game is important, particularly in Japan, as Microsoft looks to keep the momentum gained by its recent, unprecedented successes in this part of the world. With Microsoft's internal studios incapable of producing such highly-regarded Japanese RPGs (most obviously because of their geography – it's not their fault), MS took steps not only to persuade Square Enix to commit exclusive RPGs to its console but also to let Microsoft promote a couple of them in its own booth at the Tokyo Game Show.

As a lure to attract Japanese gamers to the Microsoft stand, *Star Ocean 4* (and, to a slightly lesser extent, *The Last Remnant*) worked wonders. The TGS demo took place in a spectacular icy world, although the game's post-WWIII space travel theme will ensure that many other planets can be visited in the final code. Even with a few months till its release, *Star Ocean 4* feels virtually complete and plays a solid game of team-based battles. *The Last Hope* is of the instigate-battles-yourself variety of RPG, so there's no randomness to worry about here. The game's tactical edge comes from managing a team of four adventurers and using their respective attributes to gain advantages in battle. *Star Ocean 4* isn't overcomplicated, but it is clearly an accomplished production with its own uniquely gorgeous visual style. Thanks to that, and the crucial history of the series, *The Last Hope* will be the 360's biggest Japanese hit to date when it lands in February.



Microsoft stands to gain a huge amount of territory in Japan with Star Ocean 4

SYSTEM: XBOX 360 / **CATEGORY:** RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** TRI-ACE / **DUE:** MARCH 2009

The jury is still out on which other characters will make it across to the home console versions of the game

STREET FIGHTER IV

● *Street Fighter IV* had already taken Japan's arcades by storm before it showed up at the Tokyo Game Show in its PS3 and Xbox 360 forms, but it was well worth taking a look at the game in its console guises. On this showing, it seems that *SFIV* at home won't *quite* match the coin-op in terms of visual grace, but the differences are minor to the point of being difficult to notice. The controls, however, are replicated perfectly when played with a good arcade-style joystick (none of the Xbox 360 or PS3 versions of *SFIV* at TGS were playable with standard joypads because, y'know, that would have been sacrilege).

One benefit of the home editions is that they feature exclusive characters, including *SF Alpha* gal Sakura-chan, who was playable at TGS and can be seen in all her feisty glory in the screenshots on this page. Another reason to invest notes rather than coins is the prospect of online fights, but inter-system play wasn't demoed at the show and we still don't know exactly how network competition will work. In terms of the fight between PS3 and Xbox 360, there really appears to be *nothing* to choose between the two conversions – especially as at TGS they were both playable with the same joysticks. Barring any last-minute hiccups, *SFIV* on the 360/PS3 is on course to bring this massively enjoyable game home in almost perfect condition. Only a few months to go now...

The controls are replicated perfectly when played with a good arcade-style joystick

SYSTEM: PS3/XBOX 360 / **CATEGORY:** BEAT 'EM UP / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM / **DUE:** FEBRUARY 2009

YAKUZA 3

● The brilliant *Yakuza 2* may have only turned up on the PS2 in Australia at the end of September, but SEGA's PS3-based *Yakuza 3* (which is actually the fourth game in the series – there was a Japan-exclusive side-story released early in 2008) is already well into development. Ever-present protagonist Kiryu Kazuma again takes the main role and although he's not looking for sailors in *Yakuza 3*, there's a definite Ryo Hazuki-ness about him.

Where previous games were centred in Japanese urban locations such as Osaka, this new game takes Kiryu from Tokyo all the way down to the southern islands of Okinawa and back. The tropical Okinawan setting is probably vital to keep the series from repeating itself, and it certainly seems to provide a change of pace: visiting Ryukyuu, Kiryu even wears a Hawaiian shirt.

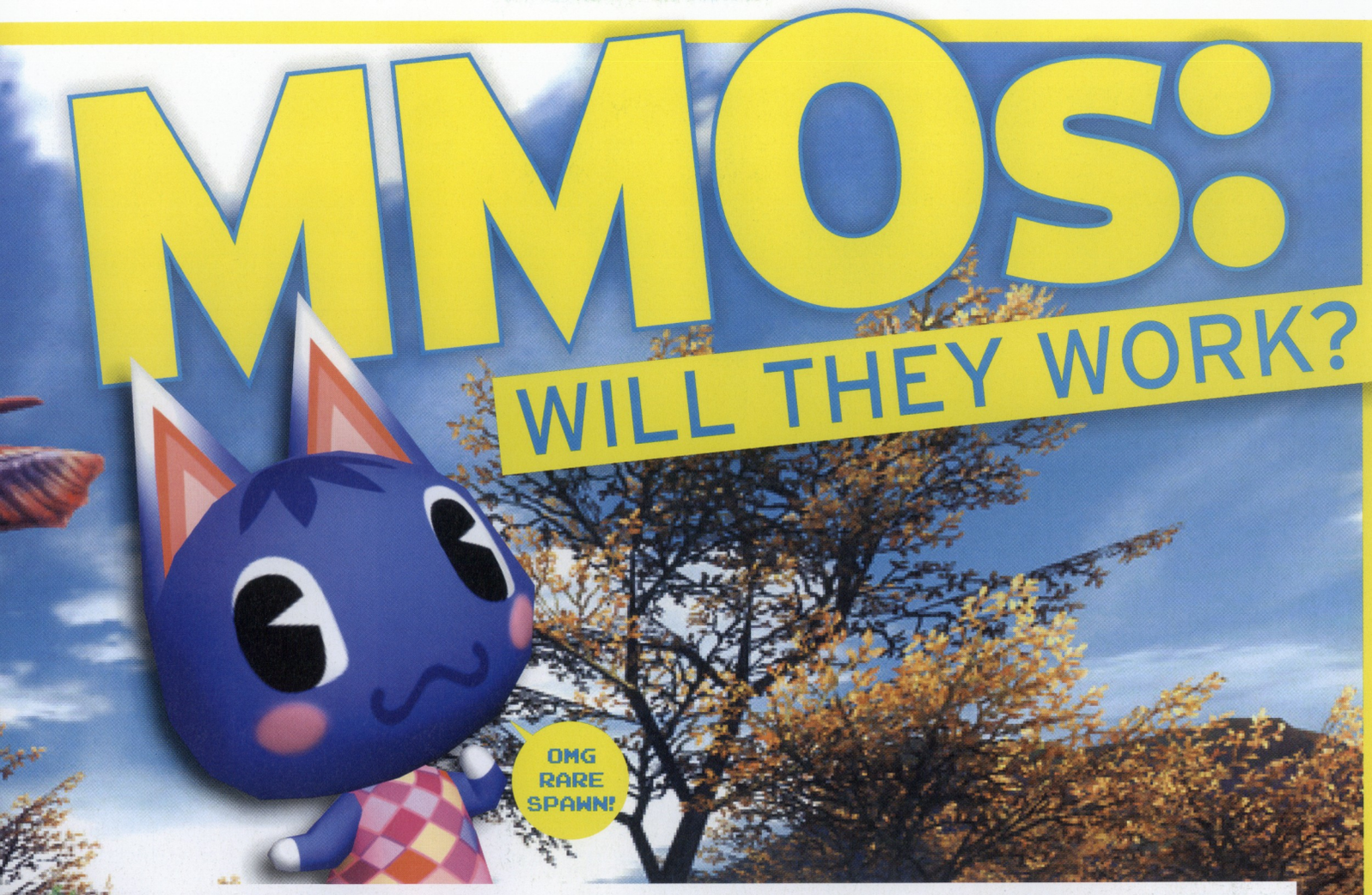
The big attraction for local Japanese gamers (and indeed non-gamers, who also seemed to be drawn in by *Yakuza 3* at TGS) is its use of Japanese actors and actresses in voicing its cast of colourful characters. These local celebrities provide their likenesses as well as their voices, so the whole thing looks and sounds as close to a modern Japanese film as you could possibly get without putting your joypad down and heading to a cinema. Considering the gap between Japanese and Western releases of games in the *Yakuza* series so far, you can expect to see *Yakuza 3* Down Under in... ooh, 2011. Believe it or not, we think it'll be worth waiting for.

Night-life and Hawiian shirts as only the PS3 can render

SYSTEM: PS3 / **CATEGORY:** ADVENTURE / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** SEGA / **DUE:** SPRING 2009 (JAPAN), TBC (AUSTRALIA)

Console

MMOs: WILL THEY WORK?



If there's one genre that has had to be dragged kicking and screaming from its PC stomping grounds to the cold, harsh plains of console land, it's the massively multiplayer online game (MMO). Long has this beast grazed on various system requirements and user interfaces and – actually, I have no idea where this metaphor is going; MMOs are coming to consoles, m'kay?

The tide of releases making their way to the Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii are hardly of tsunami proportions, but it's the journey that we're interested in, simply because we're not entirely convinced that the MMO experience will actually work on consoles. There are several elements that need to be addressed – hurdles, if you like – that may in fact stymie this genre in its inevitable move to consoles. We have no doubt that in time these will all (hopefully) be addressed, but it's definitely an interesting time in the genre's life cycle, as we witness its first steps towards reaching a brand new audience.

HISTORY REPEATS

There are only a handful of previous console MMO titles, spanning all the way back to the Dreamcast (56k, oh yeah!) with Phantasy Star Online (2001). This represented MMO gaming at its birth, and thus the game was extremely limited. Parties were small, quests were grind-a-thons and communication was handled via a limited set of emote symbols.

Then came the PS2 revolution and with it a game called Everquest Online Adventures (2003), a watered down MMORPG that charged a subscription fee to play. However, the most important step here was that the game was built for the PS2 console, so you had combat and communication options mapped to each button. Additionally, you could use a keyboard to chat.

The next console MMORPG of note was originally released on the PS2 in Japan in 2002, but then also ported to the PC and Xbox 360 (2004 and 2006, respectively). Final Fantasy XI, also a subscription-based title, was a much more complicated game and required the navigation of many macros and menu-driven systems in order to effectively engage in combat and communicate with other players. Indeed, many felt that although the game ostensibly could be played using just a controller, a keyboard was essential.

Gamers had a couple of years to muck around with these games before Phantasy Star Universe burst onto the scene in 2006 (PC, PS2, 360). Like most Phantasy Star games, the option is present to play the game as either a solo or online adventure. Perhaps the biggest step forward was the inclusion of voice communication for the 360 version, but sadly this never really made up for the repetitive gameplay, small number of spells, crappy crafting system and overly simplified combat – not to mention the lack of any kind of subscription-free trial period.

As you can see, there hasn't exactly been a console MMO experience that has blown gamers away. Obviously there are several issues that need to be resolved if MMOs are to work on consoles. These range from the choice of input methods and chatting options, through to the vagaries of development periods, patch application/certification and cross-platform interaction. Let's have a look at each of these in turn.

> THE WAY A PLAYER INTERACTS WITH A GAME HAS A MASSIVE IMPACT ON HIS/HER EXPERIENCE

CONTROLLING THE BEAST

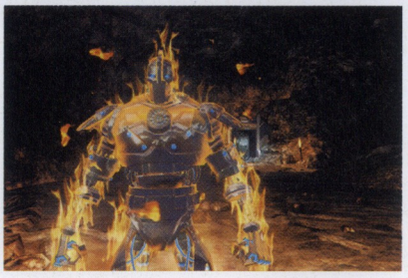
The way that a player interacts with a game has a massive impact on his/her experience. If you're constantly wrestling with the controls, or have no bloody idea what they are, then it's safe to assume that you're not going to enjoy the game very much.

MMOs are, by their very nature, complex games. The screen itself is full of visual information, comprised of stat bars, skills, EXP levels, player information, chat

by Dylan Burns

Nothing says console like cyber-dinosaurs

How do you cram a keyboard of controls into 16 inputs?



channels, just to name a few. Of course, PC gamers have the luxury of a mouse and keyboard, which allows them to explore the screen intuitively and utilise key-based short cuts and macros. For the PC gamer, an MMO is instantly immersive because they can so easily navigate the world, chat to other players, compare and equip gear, target mobs, trade and loot to their heart's content. It's almost second nature.

MMOs actually require this quick and intuitive knowledge of gameplay systems, particularly during combat, where the timely use of a particular skill can mean the difference between victory and an annoying death. Imagine, then, how difficult it must be for developers to try and 'simplify' all of this and map it to a console controller.

One simple answer here is that developers simply assume that the player has access to a console keyboard and/or mouse, particularly in the case of the PS3. However, this assumption is a dangerous one to make, as it effectively alienates a whole demographic of gamers who do not. Realistically, every single little control aspect for a game needs to be crammed into those sixteen controller inputs. What inevitably happens, then, is some kind of modifier system, where certain button or trigger input remaps all of the buttons to a secondary set of commands. This multiplies your input options greatly, but also requires a fair bit of dexterity from the player. If done right, though, it could work quite well.

> MMOS ACTUALLY REQUIRE THIS QUICK AND INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE OF GAMEPLAY SYSTEMS

CHIT CHAT

Not every gamer is a garrulous Yank with a penchant for rattling off meaningless drivel over the headset. Still, every once in a while you might want to actually, you know, talk to someone in a multiplayer game. Admittedly, most chat in PC MMOs is done via the keyboard, with a plethora of various memes and acronyms used to shortcut actual language. Headset chat is present in most big titles, but tends to be used more within organised guild raids, rather than as the norm.

Interestingly, it's on consoles that the reverse is true. Online gaming lobbies and in-game squads absolutely need voice communication as a quick and easy means to organise players – or just chat about how awesome that last headshot was! The point is that voice chat on the 360, and to a lesser extent the PS3, is already an integrated and highly used feature. The only question then is how the hell will this be implemented in an MMO?

Do we really want to wander around and always be within voice 'spheres' or areas where everyone who is chatting can be heard in that vicinity? If you can easily target players as they flit by, it might be possible to instigate instant voice exchanges, but that doesn't seem very intuitive. The only other way we can see it working is for voice chat to be possible within parties and guilds, as well as within instances. And then, if you wish to communicate with some random passer-by, the use of emotes might be the only option.

It will be interesting to see if there will be any alternatives for, say, posting in the Looking for Group channel, or for trading goods with other players. These interactions provide a large part of the flow for most of the big MMOs but may, sadly, need to be vastly restricted or simplified for console releases.

A PC gamer tries to protect herself from the console menace

PAY FOR PLAY

Then there's the rather sticky subject of monthly subscriptions. Yes it sucks if you have a few of these games on the go, but the reality is that if the game is good enough you'll quite happily pay the asking fee each month.

The interesting aspect here has to do with the relationship between the developers of a title and the owners of the console that the game is on. The exact numbers, ratios, percentages (what have you) are not known, but it is a fact that the parent console companies demand a share of all DLC and/or subscription profits made by third party game titles. Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo will all demand a profit share that is rumoured to hover around the 30% mark.

Throw into the mix both a publisher who wants a cut of each month's subscription and the actual developer of the game, who needs the ongoing revenue in order to regain the costs of making the game in the first place (as well as maintain the MMO itself), and you have a dramatically shrinking profit tree for all involved in a console MMO release.

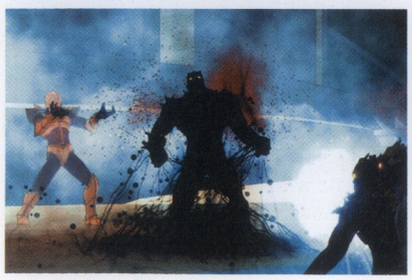
While this situation doesn't quite discourage developers to release their behemoth onto consoles, it's certainly a fairly hefty chunk that is taken out of the profit pie, and if anything it actually gives an advantage to the parent software companies if they should decide to release their own MMO title. We guess time will tell whether consoles represent a viable business model for third party developers and publishers.

PATCH IT UP

Closely related to the issue of subscriptions is the certification process required for any and all post-release patches. Basically, this process is a strict, and in many cases slow, process whereby all additional elements that are applied to a game need to be rigorously tested and approved in order to maintain a stable and consistent experience for users of a particular platform. If you've ever wondered why a patch for your favourite game is taking so long – blame the certification process.

Of course, the patching process for MMOs is an infinitely more involved process than for most other games. Rarely do we see a PC MMO these days that does not require a fairly hefty patch download on a regular basis, sometimes even on release day. Realistically, given the reduced hard drive space of consoles, it's simply not viable to assume that you can apply large patches to console MMO releases.

All of these games will need to be as bug-free as possible on release. One way



Champions Online Q&A: Jack Emmert

We contacted 2K, Atari and Sony with some questions regarding MMO development on consoles. Only 2K managed to get back to us with any answers, and even then we feel that some of these answers really missed the point. Not exactly a fervent publisher reaction to promote this pioneering genre, then. In any case, here's what Cryptic Studios' **Jack Emmert** had to say:

Q: What steps have you taken with respect to the game's controls to make the MMO experience work on consoles?

We started developing with both the PC and the Xbox 360 in mind. So we aren't trying to port over a PC product onto the console; Champions Online has been natively developed for both platforms.

Q: MMOs are ever-evolving, with some rather large patches needed over each game's lifetime. How do you ensure that gamers' hard drives won't get filled with patches post-release? Additionally, how will patches be affected by the certification process?

We don't plan on having patches so large that hard drive size would become a consideration. We are in constant talks with Microsoft about the certification process; Microsoft has been a great partner in these discussions. They totally understand the value of a MMORPG on the Xbox360.

Q: Obviously you can't go into exact details, but how does having to share your profits (from subscriptions) with the console owner impact on the profitability of bringing an MMO to a console?

The economics of a PC only game and an Xbox 360 game are indeed different, but this is something we've been looking towards for quite a while. We know the hurdles and are working with everyone to make the best MMORPG possible.

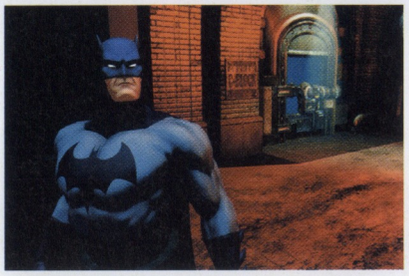
Q: How are you managing in-game communication with your title?

We are definitely enabling voice chat, but we also have a "quick emote" system for those who just want to communicate with the bare minimum of sound and animation.

Q: Do you think that we will see a time when both console and PC gamers can be playing the same MMO, be having the exact same experience, and neither group will be disadvantaged or hampered in any way (particularly for PvP)? If this is something you think your game will offer, tell us how it will do this.

That's what we're currently planning on now! Our technology certainly allows for cross play; in fact, many of our playtests have been done with PC's and Xbox 360 dev kits. Our constant playtesting and quick iteration addresses (we hope!) any of these inequalities. We totally know there is a possibility of a discrepancy, so we're coming up with lots of possible solutions.

THe Joker is totally dumbed down for console



Batman is PC all the way

> CROSS-PLATFORM INTERACTION HAS NOT BEEN A FEATURE OF MANY GAMES

to ensure this is to release the game first on the PC and then, after several patches, developers can think about porting the game to consoles. This is what we're seeing with titles such as Age of Conan.

PC ON MY CONSOLE

Cross-platform interaction has not been a feature of many games to date. Most of the time the PC champs like to keep to themselves and the console hordes feel much more secure on their proprietary online platforms, such as Xbox Live or PlayStation Network.

The problem you have with MMOs is that they require a lot of players in order for the game world to feel alive. For guilds to form, alliances to take place and large-scale conflicts to occur, each game needs the numbers to sustain itself.

One way to do this is to allow for cross-platform interaction. So, PC players can gank console noobs, and vice versa. Unfortunately, given some of the issues that we've already addressed, this is easier said than done. If console players have only limited communication and control options, then the PC zealots will run rings around them in most situations. How frustrating would it be, as a console player, to see all of this game chat taking place with no way to 'plug in', so to speak, to the in-game community?

Some upcoming titles are looking at cross-platform play, but it remains to be seen whether this is a feature that will work for these types of games. At the very least, you'll be able to buy a game that allows PC and console cross-play and look forward to a world that is populated and full of nude, dancing elves...

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

The final hurdle that a developer needs to face when developing an MMO for consoles is the fact that, historically, each console generation has a lifetime of around five or six years. This coincides with the amount of time it takes to build an MMO from the ground up – around four to five years. If developers start from scratch on a console title, then when they finally release the game it's going to look decidedly dated and anachronistic.

Developers have several choices. The first is to take an existing, finished title and port it to consoles, effectively 'dumbing' it down. The plus side here is that the game franchise is already recognisable and you have a finished product to work with. A second option is to use an existing IP and 'MMO-ify' it by developing a distinctly less-involved console game themed around the parent franchise. Final Fantasy XI is definitely an example of this.

A third option is to dive in head first and develop an original game with a view to future technology. Realistically, this approach is only really possible when it comes to in-house games, titles that are developed by the parent companies of consoles, which can utilise knowledge of their own internal technologies to ensure that the game can make an impact on release. The upcoming MMO titles being developed and published by Sony (see the boxout) are perhaps the best examples of this.

MMO PHAIL?

Although we may be painting a somewhat dreary picture, we are confident that MMOs can and will work on consoles in the future; they're just a lot more complicated than most other genres and thus we feel that developers face several massive challenges when it comes to delivering the MMO experience to a console audience.

If done right, these games have the potential to be incredibly immersive, particularly with the 5.1 sound blasting in your ears as you sit in front of your massive HDTV. There will be some failures along the way, that is inevitable, but that just means that the next developer will be able to learn from the mistakes of their forbears and hopefully deliver a much more impressive title.

The console crowd also represents an exciting array of potential audiences when it comes to MMOs, and we wouldn't be surprised to see MMO first person shooters or even MMO real time strategy titles, particularly as the genre grows and learns to diversify on consoles. Whatever the outcome, it's gamers who will reap the rewards. Let's just hope that this massive genre can take the required baby steps necessary for the transition, and that it doesn't trip over its own feet. «

Robin, meet Nightwing. He's like an older you. Sorry kid.

UPCOMING CONSOLE MMOS

There are only a handful of confirmed MMO titles making their way to consoles (all due next year some time), but we think some of them will actually be a lot of fun to play. On the 360 side of the fence you have the adult-themed Age of Conan – cue the throngs of topless female avatars running about Tortage! This looks like a straight port, although Funcom and Atari are being surprisingly tight-lipped about this one. Recent rumours of the game losing a big chunk of its subscription base, as well as the title's head honcho leaving recently, may auger shaky times ahead for this MMO.

Still on 360, there's the upcoming comic-inspired MMO Champions Online, by Cryptic Studios. This title will feature customizable heroes and villains, including the ability to tweak your character's superpowers and abilities. You'll also be able to design your own arch nemesis, although details on exactly how this second character will be utilised in the game are still not known.

The PS3 has a slightly more robust line up, but mainly because Sony is handling publishing duties for its three MMO titles. First up is Free Realms, a family-themed, persistent online adventure. It is rumoured that Free Realms will have a lot of content delivered entirely via a website interface. The game will also be free to play, with subscription and micro-transaction options available.

The second Sony title is DC Universe Online, in which you will create your own character and play alongside heroes and villains such as Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Doomsday, Lex Luthor, Bane and a heap more. Awesome if you love DC comics, not so awesome if you're a Marvel fanatic.

The final confirmed Sony MMO is The Agency, which takes a different approach to the genre. The Agency will be an online shooter with an FPS perspective (with a third person option). A strong spy/special ops theme will run through the game and players will take on special missions, both solo and public in nature. With character classes such as Spec Ops, Psy Ops, Tactical Specialist and Field Tech available, The Agency looks like it could be a very interesting MMO experience.

Finally we have Nintendo and the sole rumour of an Animal Crossing MMO. Almost no details have been released about this game, nor has it even been confirmed. But if forced to hazard a guess about what the game will involve, we'd probably put our money down on the ability to visit friends for a cuppa, write them a letter, pick some roses, design a shirt or two, and then whinge about how us Aussies have winter in our games when it's really summer here... or something.

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REALITY BYTES

DARREN WELLS

How to change games and influence people

Pacing and immersion are two of the most important elements of game design, yet often they're the last things that we as writers get to see. This is despite our early access to upcoming games and the occasions that we get hands-on time with preview builds, because in some cases we have to wait until the finished game arrives for review before we can get a feel of the larger picture.

Well, let me clarify. Preview code that comes to the Hyper offices is great. We can play it at our leisure and have as much time with it as we want. But sometimes the games don't come to us; we'll have to go to them. We'll have to visit the offices of various game distributors and use their equipment to see what they've got in store. This may or may not include the presence of that company's PR representative, and that may or may not affect our experience.

How so? Well, they might sit there as you're playing and highlight certain features as you come across them. "See what that enemy did? That's due to our new AI engine." "You can notice the depth of field effects there – took the team six months to get it just right." "Oh, don't worry about that bug, that'll be fixed before release." It's occasionally irritating, as it can break our immersion and just plain-out distract us, but it's certainly helpful to have that information about the game – information that we'll later be able to use in our work – on-hand as we're playing.

I've been in sessions where they insist on enabling God mode for us

Other times, we're not so lucky. Other times the PR representatives can directly impact on what we're playing, and not in a good way. I've been in sessions where they insist on enabling God mode for us, or giving us unlimited ammo, or showing us Level 2 followed by Level 7, or even reaching across to the control pad in our hands and pressing the buttons for us.

Why do that? Why chop through segmented portions of gameplay and disrupt its natural balance by throwing in every weapon and unlimited health right from the start? Some rationalise it by saying it's the only way they can show us a range of cool content and features in a short space of time. Others do it to make the play experience "easier" for us. Others still seem to do it because it's how they play games themselves.

Surely the problem with this approach is self-evident. It's fine to push us through a whirlwind tour of a game's components, but what use is it if we have no idea of how those components work together? Dumping us in the middle of Level 4 is bad enough, but turning on a cavalcade of cheats just downright ruins the experience. How on earth are we meant to evaluate the health refill system or the ammunition placement if we're invincible and wielding unlimited shells? The effectiveness of the tutorial, the flow of the story, the sense of progression... all that is forced to wait until we either have the preview build in our office, or when we're reviewing the final version. And don't get me started on the whole leaning-over-to-press-the-buttons-for-you thing. Last time I checked, games don't come packaged with a PR rep that springs out of the box to help you through a tough bit.

Game publishers, please, have some confidence in your product to let it stand on its own, rather than feeling you have to speak on its behalf. In fact, you're not speaking – when you modify the developer's intentions to suit your own busy schedules, you're completely stepping on its toes, changing how it's meant to be played into how you want it to be seen.

Let us explore on our own. Let the game unravel naturally. Let us see it how it'll be seen come release day, because remember: games writers are gamers, too.

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Worthless – just don't bother	Awful, a waste of time	A failure in many areas	Below the bar in most respects	Average, an example of mediocrity	Good, but could be better	Very good, but with a few niggles	Highly rated, a fine game	Excellence in pixels	A masterpiece, a must-buy, a future classic

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL
Don't have this game in your collection? Get it now!

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

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

54 LITTLEBIGPLANET PS3

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52 FABLE II

Does the hype of Peter Molyneux deliver the game we were promised? Find out inside!

Internet trolling: you're doing it very right.

Mothers-in-law are the worst.

Fable II

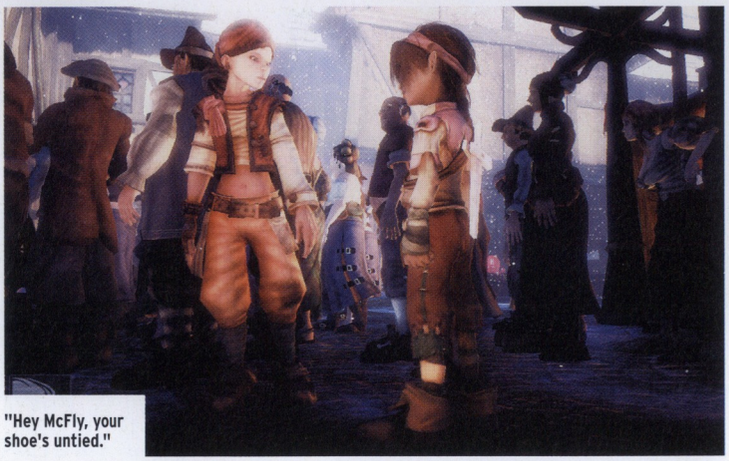
DANIEL WILKS ate all the pies

500 years have passed since the events of the first Fable, and Albion is a changed place. The Guild of Heroes is long gone and heroes as a whole have disappeared from the land. Enter the player, a young girl or boy who witnesses their sister being murdered by a crazed noble. After barely surviving being shot and knocked out a window, the young hero is raised and trained by a mysterious benefactor. As an adult it is revealed that you are the fourth Hero and that the task before you is to find and gather the other three heroes, each of whom has no knowledge of their destiny, in an effort to stop the murderous noble and his resurrection of terrifying old world technologies and magics.

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

category: **RPG** / players: **1-2**
developer: **Lionhead**
publisher: **Microsoft**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

It's finally here. After a few years of waiting and what seems like a few hundred hours of Peter Molyneux talking about how amazing his new game is, Fable II is finally here, with nearly all of the features that Molyneux boasted about. And it's good. I'll say that right off the bat. It's really good; charming, weirdly funny, lovely to look at, immediately accessible yet surprisingly deep and full of some wonderful small touches that reward exploration, talking to everyone you meet, reading everything you can and just generally trying to live in the world of Albion.



"Hey McFly, your shoe's untied."

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

A lot of the pre-release hype surrounding Fable II revolved around the canine companion of the main character and how it would not only be an integral part of the game but also something that would make gamers everywhere wonder why nobody had thought of it before. Built using a highly modified version of the creature code from Black and White, the dog is, true to Molyneux boasts, a wonderful addition to the game and I do wonder why nobody had though of it before. The dog acts as a danger radar, growling or whimpering when danger is nearby, attacks downed foes, hunts out treasure chest or spots to dig and can be taught numerous tricks that can help entertain, intimidate or otherwise influence the human inhabitants of Albion. Like the actual character, the look of the

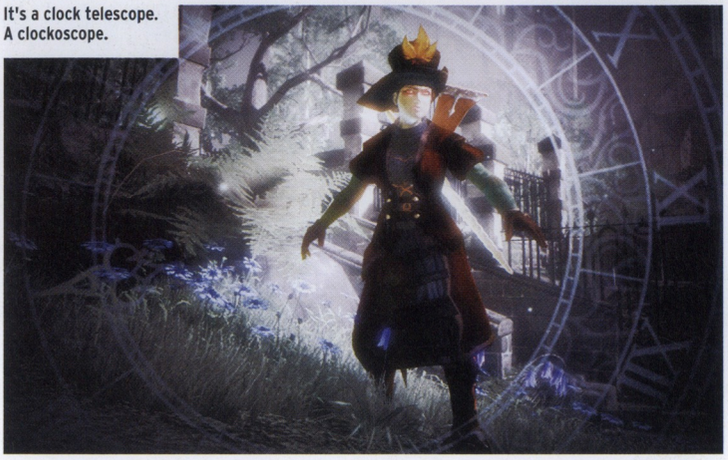
I ATE ALL THE PIES!

Taking care of how your character looks will inevitably play a large role in Fable II. No matter if you decide to follow a virtuous or evil path, players will buy outfits to increase appearance attributes to make themselves more attractive, intimidating, kindly, goofy or what have you. They'll buy tattoos, makeup, hairstyles, beards and moustaches. Seeing the effect a simple change in outfit can have on the way people react to you is great - even when it gets to the rather stalkerish level of having random people run up to your character expecting a proposal and a ring.

Food also has a definite effect on the way your character looks, and it seems a little out of balance. If I were more suspicious in nature I would swear that Peter Molyneux is a vegetarian. Why? Well, every single meat or fish based foodstuff in the game is fattening and the seemingly vast majority of meat based foods also lower the character's purity level, moving them towards an evil path. Instantly becoming chubby and a little bit evil seems a little too high a price to pay for eating a meat pie to heal some of the damage you've taken while, let's say, defending the Temple of Light against evil.

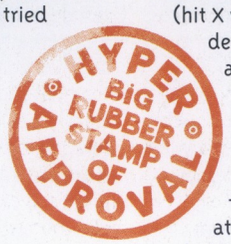
We haven't has a chance to get into co-op as yet – we'll let you know what we think when the game goes live.

Ahh, to pine for a world before neon signs...



It's a clock telescope. A clockoscope.

dog changes depending on the actions of the player, as does the dog's behaviour. If you're kindly, give the dog treats, play with it and treat it well, the dog will be a great companion, helping out whenever it can and generally just being a totally lovable bit of code. Treat it badly and it could turn aggressive, cowardly and, if what we're heard is true, can even run away never to return. I haven't actually tried myself because... well... I kind of got attached to Old Yeller, even though I did give him a rather fatalistic name.



HACKETY-SLASH

Much has also been said about the "one button" combat system. The name is something of a misnomer – even though there is only one melee attack button, one ranged attack button, one magic button and one dodge button, combat is never about hammering one button alone – using all buttons is the key to success. The X button is keyed to melee attacks, and through levelling up Strength abilities the basic melee attack is enhanced with the ability to block (by holding down X), deliver powerful "flourish" attacks (hold down X and push the left stick towards the enemy you want to attack), perform longer combos (hit X with the right timing), deliver disorienting counter attacks (hit X just before an enemy connects with an attack) and more. Each of the buttons only controls one action – Y is used for ranged attacks and B for magic, but like melee, each button has multiple skills attached to it – magic heavy players can have up to five different spells simultaneously attached to the B button, the length of time the button is held down determining which spell is cast.

YOU ARE NOW WELL KNOWN ENOUGH TO KISS MY ARSE

In addition to the story and side quests there are a number of activities to pass the time. Players can take odd jobs, such as smithing, woodcutting or pouring beer for extra cash. These odd jobs are basic mini-games in which players must stop a moving dot within a decreasing target area. Through the menu system players can monitor which jobs are available, as well as checking to see if any stores are having sales. If the job or store is in an area the player has already visited, they can choose to rapid travel there instead of walking. 50 silver keys are scattered across Albion for players to find, as are 50 Gargoyles. Hunting the Gargoyles is especially rewarding – not only do you get a reward for each 10 you shoot, the little buggers also insult you when you find them, making it a real pleasure to smash them when you find them.

Simply holding down the magic button triggers an area of effect attack but angling the thumbstick towards the enemy makes it a ranged attack. Depending on the level of ranged skill and the length of time the Y button is depressed, players can take more precise aim at enemies, allowing for headshots and decapitations. The combat system is outwardly simple, but after only a few hours of play you realise how clever and deep it really is.

the really special moments that occur during the game just come across as rather lame in anecdote form – who really gives a rat's arse if I made my character give the finger to an abusive warden and partly it's because giving away some of the events in the game would do a real disservice to the sense of discovery, but ultimately it's because the game is so much about the way you choose to behave and influence the world is a very personal experience

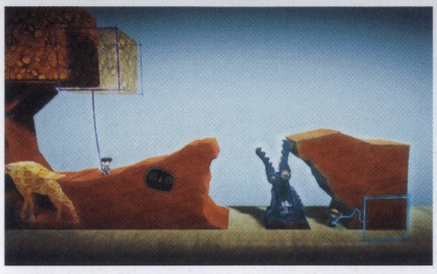
> **Fable II is a game that is dependent on the player observing the world and influencing it through word and deed**

A lot of words so far and all I've really talked about are the mechanics. There's a good reason for that – Fable II is a game that is so dependent on the player observing the world and influencing it through word and deed that it's hard to put down in words why it's great. Partially it's because that some of – what I've done is totally different from what Darren is planning to do (all I'm going to say is that the heartless bastard doesn't like dogs) which in turn will probably be different from what you will do. One thing is all but certain though – watching events unfold will be a memorable experience. «

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Deep combat, excellent character customisation, the dog is awesome, lots of memorable moments	Some clipping issues, inventory menus can become a little unwieldy	Molyneux may talk big but he knows how to deliver a great game	9

The arm bone's connected to the neck bone...

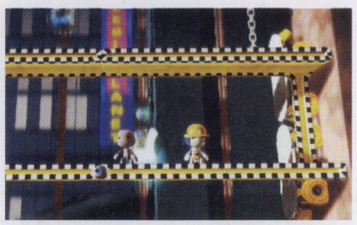
Sackboy? SACKBOY? SACKBOOOOOY!



LittleBigPlanet

What level will DARREN WELLS and DANIEL WILKS create next?

HYPER GAME OF THE MONTH



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

category: **Platformer** / players: **1-2**
developer: **Media Molecule**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Wells: **Gaming has a new icon, and his name is Sackboy.** He doesn't have a supercharged arsenal, or a blistering running speed, or cat-like agility. He doesn't have a nose, or even a voice. But when you hit Down on the D-Pad to make his bottom lip tremble in sadness, X to make him jump over an obstacle that appears to be made from stitched felt, or Circle to bring up his Popit menu to build a level of your own, you realise what he does offer: personality, charm and endless creativity.

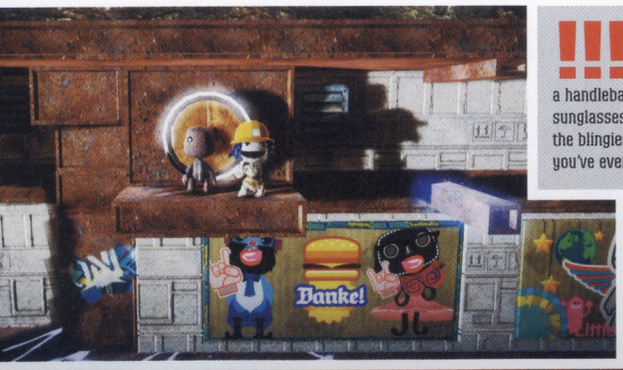
That's LittleBigPlanet, and it's a game that the PS3 – or indeed, gaming as a whole – has never before seen the likes of. At its most basic level it's a 2.5D platformer starring a cute-as-all-heck main character, but beneath that it's an accessible puzzler, a deep construction platform, and a great demonstration of the strengths of player customisation.

Wilks: Don't forget the truly brilliant soundtrack as well dude – I think it will go down in the annals of gaming history as one of the catchiest, most fitting soundtracks ever. It's easily as good as the soundtrack of Katamari Damacy. Maybe even better. While the creation of levels is really the heart of the game, the single player campaign isn't anything to be sneezed at, with 50 odd levels of physics-based platforming to make your way through. The levels start off simple enough but after a few hours proceedings become devilishly hard – case in point being a level we are currently stuck on that requires perfectly timed jumps to avoid electrically charged obstacles. Doesn't sound too bad, but when you add in the fact that the level is constantly rotating it becomes something of a nightmare ride. I have a sneaking suspicion, however, that it will be a cakewalk compared to some of the devious levels that will be created by users. A simple check of YouTube at the moment shows how clever – and cruel – some of the level creators in the Beta are.

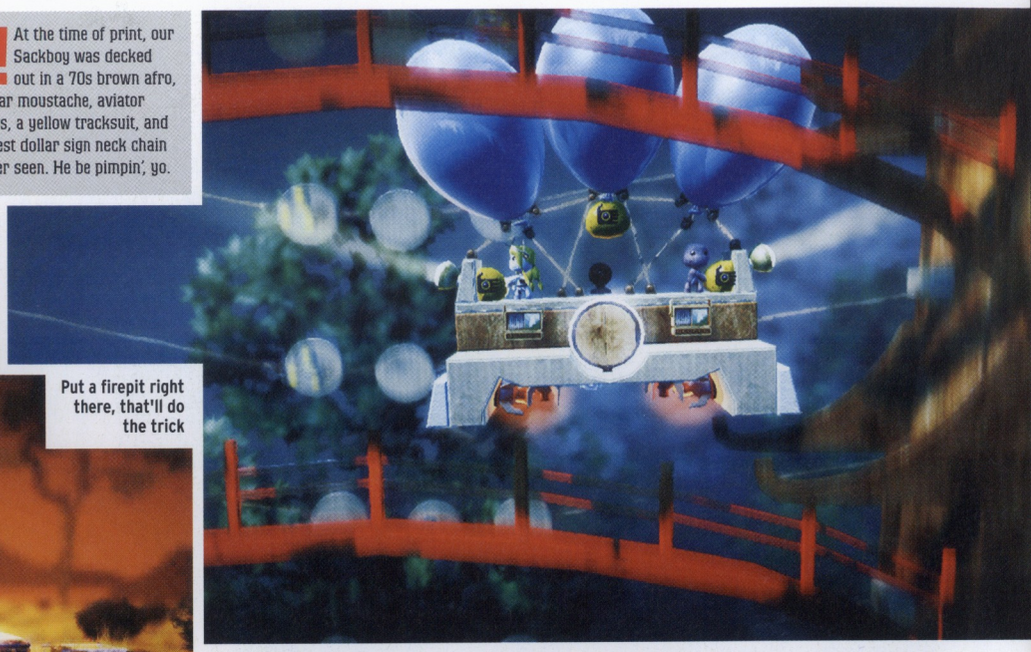
Wells: No doubt we can expect things to get even more fiendish, more creative and more diverse once players have spent time with the final product. If the likes of a working calculator and an array that plays the theme to Final Fantasy X are any indication, there will be plenty of exciting developments coming out of the LBP community.

That said, there's still a fine offline experience to be had. After navigating a cleverly designed introduction – one that turns the production credits into its own level – you're guided through the game world by the honey-like voice of

HOW AWESOME IS STEPHEN FRY? Correct answer: very. An even more correct answer would be "extremely", "immensely" or "entirely". There's pretty much nothing that Stephen Fry hasn't mastered: he's an accomplished comedian and actor in film, theatre, TV and radio, has a swagful of honorary doctorates and degrees, turned his battle with cyclothymia into a documentary, is a tech geek and lover of anything with a circuit board, drives an old London Black Cab, and has penned a few novels. Wilks actually owns an alarm clock that awakens the sleeper with phrases recorded by Fry, including: "The world has been very anxious to hear from you for the last eight hours. Shall I inform the news agencies you're about to rise, sir?" Yeah, he's awesome.



At the time of print, our Sackboy was decked out in a 70s brown afro, a handlebar moustache, aviator sunglasses, a yellow tracksuit, and the blingiest dollar sign neck chain you've ever seen. He be pimpin', yo.



Put a firepit right there, that'll do the trick

Just a typical Friday afternoon at the Hyper office

The platforming experience is fun rather than a grind, and it didn't take a reinvention of the wheel to do it

Stephen Fry, who brings you up to speed on character customisation, level design and what to do if you get stuck (short answer: blow yourself up and try again). His narration and delivery are suited perfectly to the graphical style of the game, making it feel almost like an interactive children's cartoon.

But don't take that comparison to mean that LittleBigPlanet is a merely fodder for the littlies. Yes, things start off slow, and yes, a younger audience will definitely get enjoyment from the game, but as things progress you'll come across levels that will test the reaction times and problem solving of the most seasoned gamers. The instance that Wilks mentioned earlier is but one that will present grief – who would have though such an innocent looking game could throw so much change into our swear jars.

But it's an enjoyable challenge. It's a game that makes the platforming experience fun rather than a grind. And the remarkable thing is that it didn't take a reinvention of the wheel to do it. There are no gaudy bells and whistles that have been bolted onto the formula for the sake of it; in fact in some areas LittleBigPlanet takes a few paces back from what modern platformers are doing. The result works.

Wilks: The physics of the game sometimes lead to problems – landing on small platforms can be a bit of a pain in the butt due to momentum – but on the whole, LittleBigPlanet is one of the most impressive and bug free games I've encountered in a long time. I was initially skeptical as to how long the game would last considering that it almost entirely depends on the creativity of the community, but the sheer amount of output in the beta really gives me hope that LBP will be one of those games that will last in the minds (and consoles) of gamers for a good long while. To be honest, I don't really have the patience to trial and error my way through creating a level. I'm much more at home exploring a level, unlocking everything I can, finding secret areas and placing the right stickers on the right objects to activate them. As far as I'm concerned I don't think there is a better platformer on the market, and I have a hunch that it's only going to get better upon release.

Wells: Normally I'm skeptical on the concept of player customisation, and the mentality of "release your game, then get the community to create the content for you". It gives the developers too much leeway: If it tanks, they blame the community; if it succeeds, they credit the development team. But in the case of LittleBigPlanet, although there is a decent slab of pre-made levels included, the creation of one's own content IS the game. Messing around with the tools IS the game. It's like a digital LEGO set that lets the owner play with the included product, or use the blocks to build whatever they want. The presentation and design of LBP fosters this brilliantly, and while it's fun roaming around the levels designed by the Media Molecule team, it's just as fun to build something of your own. From a technical standpoint it's intuitive and easy, from a grey matter standpoint it tests your creativity and logic prowess, and from a gameplay standpoint... well, that's entirely up to you. It can be anything you want it to be.

Solid Snake, Lara, Nariko, Drake: you all had your chance to be the face of the PS3. Sackboy beat you to it. Let's make him welcome.

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Sublime presentation, charming main character, massively powerful editor	Occasionally dodgy physics, complexity limit applied to level construction	It's a great game now, but once the community gets stuck into it, LittleBigPlanet should be spectacular	9

Warhammer Online

CHRISTIAN READ is actually a Nurgling

Well, its buggy, jerky, the servers can be a bit of a butcher's shop of weird connections and some of the instanced RvR is still a bit weird but Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning may very well be the next big thing. It passes the true test – look out the window and seeing sunrise, you shrug your shoulders and keep playing.

Let's get the comparisons out of the way right now. It isn't WoW. Most of its faults and detractions will probably come from that simple fact. In some ways it's inferior. In some, it's pretty much the same game. But in others, WAR looks to have built very firmly on the successes and failures of WoW and other MMOs and found ways to strongly improve upon it. Where the game breaks its traditions are three areas: Realm vs. Realm combat, Public Quests and character creation/combat.

PC

category: **MMO** / players: **Lots**
developer: **Mythic**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

WE'RE NOT IN AZEROTH ANYMORE, TOTO

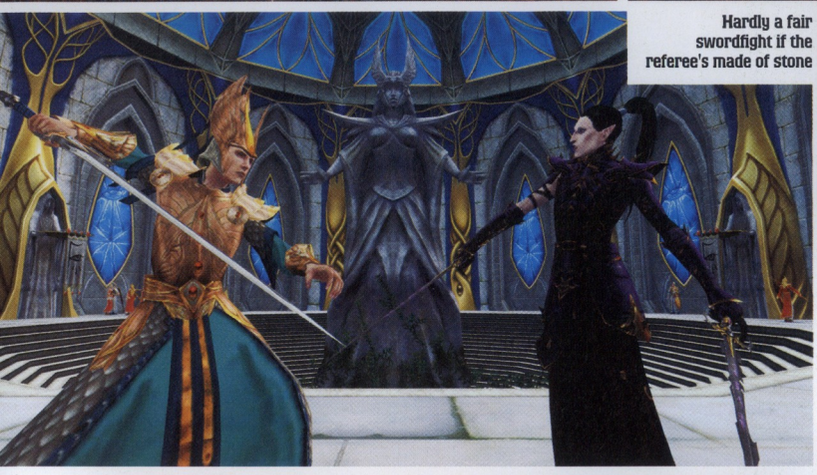
Perhaps the most familiar element of the game itself is the world. Warhammer takes its cues from Lord of the Rings, so you'll still be getting dwarves, elves and humans, dark elves, Orcs and Chaos. The Warhammer world is and always has been a rather bleaker affair than other bog standard fantasies. Chaos especially draws on other serious literary sources to create an atmosphere of horror. War and horror is everywhere. The quests reflect this so you'll get a lot of grim outcomes and bleak stories. It's Azeroth for grownups. That being said, the humour is real and black. The funniest people are the bestial Greenskins.

You'll be navigating this world with some rather fine new character classes that reflect the world. Each race has three or four discrete characters, all of which are based on rather unique game mechanics. One of the most interesting philosophies behind characters is that healing is a by-product of combat. The Archmage and Goblin Shaman, for example, have a fine balancing act to walk. For each healing spell they cast, they'll gain a bonus towards their combat spells. Cast five healing spells and you'll have a bloody great wad of damage ready to be cast. The Warrior Priest generates healing power directly through melee DPS and the other healing classes have various techniques and tricks. There's simply no room for standing up the back and lazily setting up a "heal over time" spell. Everyone fights.

Tanking is pretty much the same the world over, although there are some rather clever techniques

The obesity epidemic continued unabated.

!!! This isn't a WoW clone. With a strong Realm Vs Realm mechanism and unique PvE content in the form of Public Quests, Warhammer Online seems a strong contender for the MMO crown.



Hardly a fair swordfight if the referee's made of stone

Release the hounds! And the boars! And the Orcs!

Show off.

> **PvP is structured into the fabric of the game, making it seem much more natural and fun, especially in RvR zones**

that work closely with the rule sets of WAR. With collision detection existing between players, you just can't run through the other player. A tank can do things like hold up a bridge and activate buffs that work only on players behind them. Clever.

DOING IT IN PUBLIC

The second area in which WAR excels is the Public Quest. Bloody brilliant idea, this. They're like mini-raids anyone can take up with friends and strangers whenever you like. In several places in each zone, you'll come across areas with lots of specific mobs. Join up with a group or go it alone. Clear the area of trash mobs and soon you'll fight waves of elites, called champions, leading up to a serious boss hero or other scripted event. Here's an example of letting people see the fun content easily: dragons and massive hydras are amongst the first public bosses you can find. There's a Dwarf vs. Goblins PQ that sees you competing against the enemy factions to kill a hundred NPCs. Brutal and fun with many more to be found on the way to the level 40 cap. Taking part in Public Quests earn you Influence, which allows you access to greater gear and other rewards.

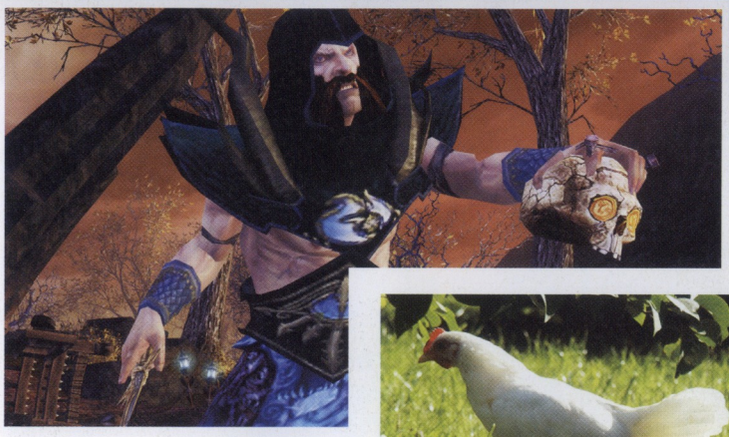
Then there's RvR combat. It's more than just a fancy word for PvP; it stands for Realm versus Realm. RvR is so integral to the concept of Warhammer that you could conceivably level to cap in Scenarios and RvR zones. Thankfully, getting into RvR is easy to do. Simply click on a button, available any time, and you'll be taken to an instanced scenario or enter specific RvR zones to fight against other players for ownership of the land. The scenarios have much in common with WoW Battlegrounds but seem to be more readily accessible, though this does come down to server population: An oceanic Core Rules server saw me popping once every twenty minutes or so at six in the morning and after dinnertime, as often as I wanted. An oceanic RP server? Not once in three days, though you should be able to expect things to sort themselves out as player bases mature and fill out.

This isn't getting ganked a dozen time in Stranglethorn Vale. PvP is structured into the fabric of the game, making it seem much more natural and fun, especially in RvR zones.

At first you'll be going in, scouting those zones out, picking off guards and then looking for a group to take certain features, such as towers, castles, altars and the like. That affects your Renown stat as well as having overall effects on zones such as prices. Hold all the zones in all the Tiers, or player level brackets, and you'll be set for endgame. That's a city siege to take

KNOW YOUR ROLE One of the unique things about the character balance is that, well, there isn't any. At least not in a traditional sense. Other MMOs might see each class with at least a chance against others in a duel but WAR makes no pretence to that kind of balance. A Witch Elf will take out a comparably levelled Bright Wizard every time. Balance is achieved in groups, in supporting roles. Tanks need to think along strict defensive lines, ranged is about run and gun versus tenacious defence but how to play a healer is still shaking out. Theories abound. Oddly, this seems to be keeping down the e-penis loot-bragging of Warcraft-style PvP. It isn't about being mad twitchy, it's about knowing a role and mastering it.

Not shown: sensible clothing.



THE POWER OF POULTRY The Tome of Knowledge is a record of your exploits, with dozens of features like a bestiary recording everything you kill, a list of your achievements, lengthy lore entries and stories, histories of important NPCs and much, much more. Best of all, the Tome keeps a list of your Titles. Underneath your name, you can display a simple phrase that you can earn which you feel best highlights your character. They range from 'Ow! My Eye!' to 'Pirate' to 'Doombringer.' It's a rather nifty way of feeling closer to your character as well as an absolute godsend to Lore junkies.

out a faction boss. This isn't ganking Thrall in Ogri. It's something that will take weeks, months, to prepare and achieve, with guilds working together. Or at least it should. Within the first week, low-level Destruction raided an Order city, so there are still bugs.

REWARDING VIOLENCE

There's an immediate reward to all this PvP and it comes in the form of experience points and Renown. There are player-killing quests and XP rewards for each Scenario you enter. Then there's an RvR specific stat, Renown. For each tier of renown you achieve, a different set of rewards is made available by a Realm-control dependent vendor.

This is one of the minuses as well as the pluses of the game. A lot of MMOs at least pay lip service to the idea of the solo player. Not WAR. Not so much for elite quests and that sort of thing, but rather that the PvP element of the game goes so much better with co-ordination and strong group composure. Thankfully, guild management in WAR is a breeze, with a host of features and robust tools, like in-built calendars, guild alliance systems, officer ranks and all that business.

But that's also one of the problems with WAR. MMOs require at least some player cooperation, as is good and proper, but this game is looking to need some serious teamwork to get by. Assuming large-scale city raids are as hard as advertised, getting to endgame is going to really lean hard on sixty or so strongly co-ordinated and motivated players. The surly soloers amongst you should take notice. The ventrilo-phobic, like this writer, could be doomed. On top of that, this is a game with grunt. The minimum specs are 2Gb of RAM and quite a good video card.

With MMOs, it's hard to really give thumbs up or thumbs down less than a month into the gold game. At the time of writing, patch 1.01 had just gone up and a small tweaking a few days later. That being said, WAR seems genuinely promising. The RvR is unique, the characters interesting and the Public Quests are a genuine stroke of design excellence. A warning though, for those of you who are just in it for PvE, this won't be your cup of tea. Unless you're prepared to march in and gank a sumbitch, you won't be getting the full experience. For those of you tired of WoW, looking to upgrade your MMO experience to something a bit more hardcore, this is absolutely worth having a look at. «

"Hi, I'm Nancy, I like good wine and walks along the beach..."

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Public Quests, Character Classes, RvR combat, dark, lore-rich world	Serious system requirements, early days yet, really not suitable for solo play	It's early day yet but Warhammer Online has the makings of an MMO that will actually stay around and even thrive.	8

Guitar Hero World Tour

officially licensed accessories

Guitar Hero World Tour

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Guitar Hero World Tour

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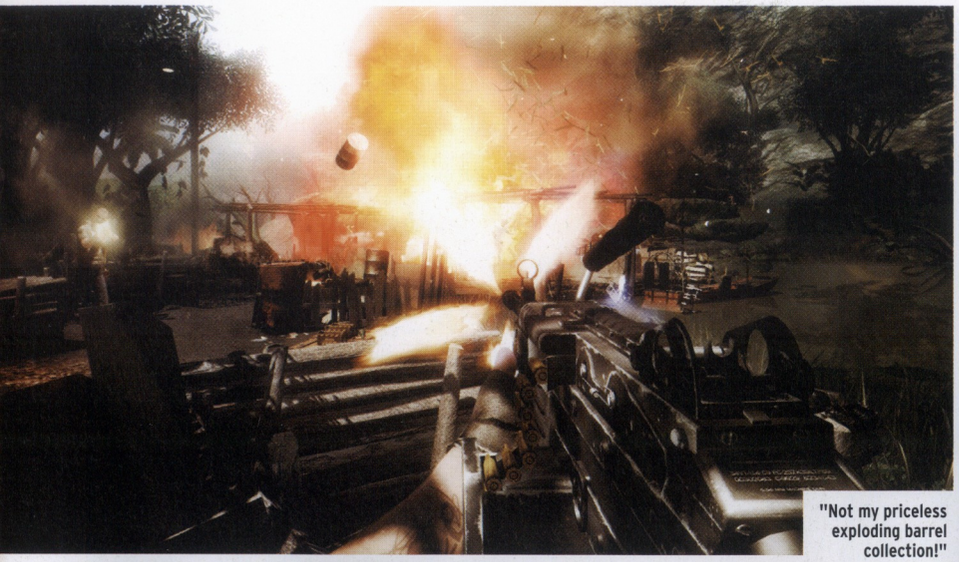


"Not my priceless exploding barrel collection!"

A special stand-in car was used to protect the real car in this scene

Far Cry 2

DARREN WELLS is listening to Toto right now

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

category: **FPS** / players: **1-16**
developer: **Ubisoft Montreal**
publisher: **Ubisoft**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **MA15+**
available: **Now**

Think of the original Far Cry. Lush, green, linear, scripted, clichéd, occasionally gaudy. Now think of the opposites to all of those words. That's Far Cry 2.

What Ubisoft Montreal has done with the former Crytek brand is nothing less than remarkable, with the team taking a name that could have existed quite merrily as a B-grade cheese-a-thon and completely reinventing it into a superior A-grade product. Forget corridor shooting, ridiculous fashion sense and a plot that could have been written on a crumpled Post-It. Far Cry 2 is an experience that's as epic as it is extraordinary.

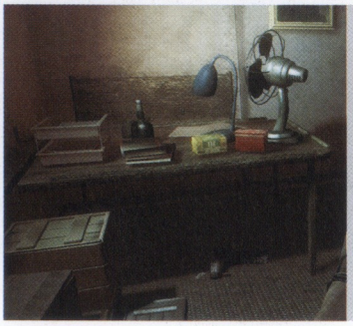
Your goal is simple: eliminate The Jackal, the man who's making a pile of dough by selling weapons to opposing factions of a crumbled African society. That's it. That's as much direction as the game gives you, and purposely so. It's only by taking on missions from these factions, and piecing together the trail of your target with snippets of gleaned information that you'll find his whereabouts. Answers aren't given to you on a platter: remember, no one knows the full story, only what they've gathered by dealing with him, or what they've heard from his audio tape missives. Direction is piecemeal, and it comes depending on how much a certain faction trusts you, which is in turn proportional to how much you can do for them. These tasks might not align with your moral compass, but you know the saying about omelets and eggs. It's a very intricately woven network of alliances, double-crosses and decision-making, and what's more, it all works.

A game of "catch the bottle" about to turn horribly wrong

Big promises are kept. When the game was first unveiled in 2007, the developers proclaimed that Far Cry 2 would never play the same way twice. Hyperbole, exaggeration, overstatement? Turns out they were right. The dynamically roaming nature of the savannah's populace — animals and people alike — not only lend it an autonomous feel, but directly impacts upon your situation. At a moment's notice a car containing enemy soldiers might ram up the backside of your own vehicle, with the occupants clearly bent on taking you down. A reload later, the road may be barren. Such instances are unpredictable, and convincingly create the illusion of an environment that's ticking along, both within and outside of your gaze. Stand in one location and just watch. A car might drive by, a soldier might stub out a cigarette, a zebra might gallop away from a distant gunshot. The actions of the game's inhabitants really do appear as though they're living in the wild just as you are, and the contrast of life against the wide canvas of remote terrain serves to further highlight the feel.

WHERE'S ME PILLS?

An introductory car ride serves to show off the environment and establish the tone. As the story is presented, the game gets you accustomed to the various



SAFE HOUSES? MORE LIKE SAVE HOUSES!

Far Cry 2's African landscape is dotted with quaint little houses, usually patrolled by a handful of guards, that serve as save points: exterminate the enemies and it's yours for the taking. Great in theory, but with the rest of the game carving out a nice illusion of realism, the lack of any in-game rationale for boxes sporting a cheery icon of a floppy disc makes them stand out as unnecessary game devices, and nothing more. Couldn't we have been penning our memoirs and leaving them for the authorities to find upon our untimely demise? Something like that would actually make sense and give the action of saving meaning in the game world. Sigh.

!!! What's up with the voice acting? It's unclear whether the performers forgot to pause between sentences, or whether the game is stitching the samples together too quickly, but everyone speaks as though full stops don't exist. Their delivery not only ruins their intended impact, but gives you less time to completely take in offered information.

Not shown: Colours that aren't brown

One false move and the shanty-town gets it!

things you'll be doing: applying bandages, fixing cars, looking for diamonds, navigating your map.

Then, once the tutorial tips finish, the apron strings are cut. You're on your own. And it's not just a simple case of "Okay, so I'll get started on the story missions" or "Right, I'll occupy myself with some side quests". Due to the scale of the game world and the unfamiliar locale, being given free reign in Far Cry 2 actually feels a little daunting. It's perhaps the first game in a long while that has so convincingly elicited a "fish out of water feeling" in the player, and it succeeds all the more because of it.

Being a game, it needs a mechanic to keep you focused, and it comes in the form of malaria. Your character suffers recurring health issues due to the disease and you're required to keep them under control with medicine, obtained in the cease-fire zone that serves as the base of operations for each faction. Placing the medicine right near your mission pickup points cleverly, but subtly, reminds you that in order to reach your ultimate goal, you've got to accept and perform tasks for those who hold the information.

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

That's not to say that you have to follow a mission's directions to the letter. Grab your orders and once you're out of enemy earshot, your mercenary buddy – a gun for hire who can help you out of a pinch – might call up and offer an alternative plan. It might be a better form of attack or a more saintly solution, and at any point you can perform an about face and pursue another course of action. Hell, keep your buddy out of the loop altogether if you want. It's the first game in a good while that isn't just another round of fetch quests – you've constantly got the freedom and the opportunity to work things your way.

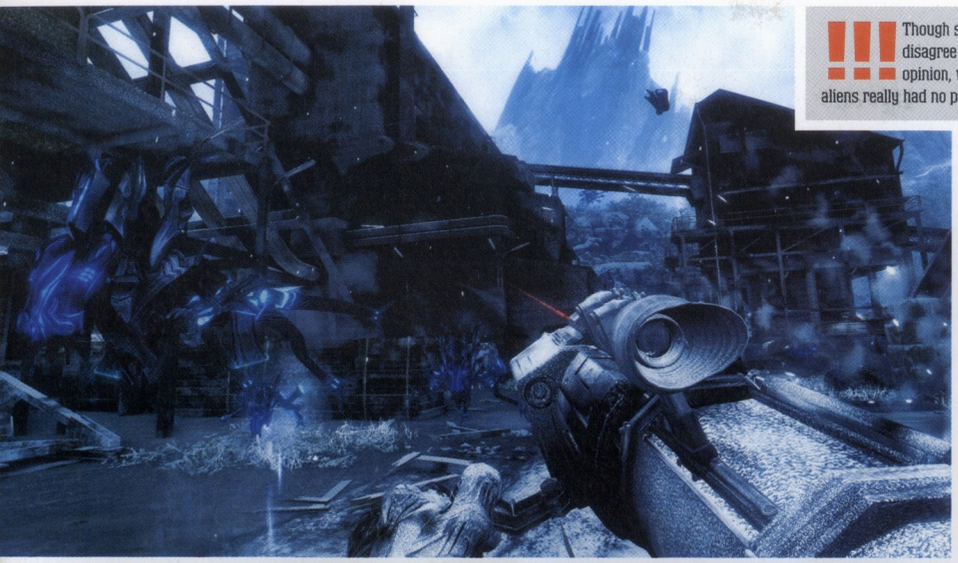
There's an extraordinary amount of tactical options present in a simple Molotov cocktail or hand grenades. With much of the environment consisting of dry grass and wood, the game doesn't allow fire to burn and keep burning – it will eventually snuff out once a moderate area has been scorched. Fair enough, we suppose.

There's so much more that's on offer in Far Cry 2 – certainly more than can be covered in a mere two-page review. Suffice to say that it's an exemplary game that finally does justice to the concept of an autonomous open-world, and it's one that is far better than it had any right to be. Hawaiian shirts and genetically engineered mutants? Hardly. Try one of the best games of the year. «

« Due to the scale of the game world and the unfamiliar locale, being given free reign in Far Cry 2 actually feels a little daunting

That extends to how you can harness the eye candy. Fire in Far Cry 2 is great – you can see how the wind fans the flames, and hear how it whips it into a mini inferno, but you can also use it as a tool to smoke out enemies from their ramshackle villages, or use it to create a defensive perimeter between yourself and your foes.

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Fantastic open world, superior AI, plenty of tactical options available	Rushed voice acting, little scenery variation, save point system, long load times	One of the deepest games available, and one that will keep mixing things up for as long as you keep playing.	9



!!! Though some may disagree with our opinion, we felt that the aliens really had no place in Crysis.

Those guns fire bullets made from refined explosion!

Bugger the helicopter - that tree has it coming

Crysis: Warhead

HORACE WADDLERS is British, muppet*

On release, Crysis was almost as famous as an unofficial benchmarking tool as it was a groundbreaking FPS. It was a game so resource hungry it needed government funding to make it run at maximum settings. Playing through on medium felt like watching the Snooker in black and white. You knew there was a whole world of experience out there and you just weren't getting it. The Crytek team took this on board, optimised the heck out of their code and promised Warhead would run on a $1000 machine.

Now, that might be true, but bare in mind they are talking about a PC that costs $1000 right about...now. While the code is optimised, don't lose sight of the fact that both Crysis and Warhead are incredibly demanding of your system. Imagine if Ferrari told you they had developed a car with more economical fuel consumption and you get the picture – seven frames to the gallon, or thereabouts.

Crytek also promised us a change of pace with Warhead. While Crysis offered plenty of opportunity for a stealthy FPS, Warhead has been touted as a more 'in your face' affair. This is due in part to you inhabiting the body of Sergeant 'Psycho' Sykes, a man with a more direct approach to problem-solving than his squad-mate Nomad.

It's best not to take this too much to heart, however, as you're just as vulnerable to bullets as Nomad was. While running in all guns blazing is a nice idea, it's also the kind of idea that makes you wind up dead. Knowing when to steam in and crack skulls and when to stick to the shadows (or cloak) is a key life skill here.

Go back to a game in which you actually fit!

Tentacles

Some critics have bemoaned the fact that the characterisation of Sykes feels shallow or half-arsed. It might be a reasonable point, were this a movie, but it's not. This is a big, brash shooter that runs around with its balls out. We would rather have seen less time spent on amateur dramatics and more time on squeezing another level or two in there somewhere. Even at a leisurely pace most players will nail this somewhere in the region of the five hour mark.

Despite being on the short side, this does feel like a new and improved Crysis. Level design feels a lot more open, although it's more a case of widening the rails rather than removing them altogether. Hooning around in a hovercraft is great, albeit unwieldy, fun.

Happily, there are less aliens this time round, although they still rear their ugly tentacles more than we'd like. They also have a habit of 'shattering' into woefully unrealistic tubes of alien meat upon death. With so much graphical wizardy, is it too much to ask for a little consistency? If it's a big bastard when it's alive, make sure it leaves a big, bloody corpse!

Online play has been given a fresh lick of paint too, with the bundled Crysis Wars promising to set right the issues that thwarted the original multiplayer. We're not entirely convinced it's good, but it is certainly better than the original MP.

All in all then, a solid effort. It's not particularly life changing, but it is life enhancing. Sort of. Make of that what you will. «

*Well, he's not. But he may as well be.

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

category: **FPS**
players: **1-32**
developer: **Crytek**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$49.95** / rating: **MA** / available: **Now**

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Fresh new Crysis for you to marvel at. Less taxing on the system. Improved MP.	More of the same. Over too quickly.	It's a decent stop-gap before Crysis 2.0, but is by no means an essential purchase.	**7**

!!! Characters exist only to berate your progress with a range of insults. If you're in the lead they'll only occasionally jump in with backhanded trash talk, but if you're lagging behind they won't hesitate to jump on the blower and tell you how crap you are.

Not shown: the crappy hatchback starter cars

Midnight Club: Los Angeles

DARREN WELLS looks great with a grill and spinners

Need for Speed isn't the only street racer on the block, you know. The Midnight Club series has been there since the turn of the millennium, putting up some friendly competition to EA's franchise. Unlike the ups and downs of its opponent, however, Midnight Club has maintained a fairly even keel when it comes to critical reception. Does the same hold true for its latest iteration?

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

category: **Racer** / players: **1-16**
developer: **Rockstar San Diego**
publisher: **Rockstar**
price: **$109.95**
rating: **TBA** / available: **Now**

VROOM VROOM

First up, let's examine what Midnight Club: Los Angeles offers. The approach to street racing remains consistent to that of its predecessors, even if the characters do occasionally take things slightly over the top. The city is larger, the look is prettier, the range of customisation options is greater... everything has been expanded to include more, more, more. Same goes for the game's visuals: The RAGE engine affords MC:LA the same level of graphical detail as GTA IV, and the new day/night cycle and weather effects compliment the lighting, shadowing and diverse scenery perfectly.

Under the pixels, it's the sort of racing game that you'd expect from the series. An open world of roads, highways and sidestreets is at your disposal, whereby you mark your desired race on the overhead map, find the car that can set it up for you, and flick your headlights to express your interest. If there are no cops nearby, you'll engage in a "race to the starts of the race", where success earns you extra reputation points. Once you're at the starting line proper, an obligatory trash talk exchange takes place, the timer ticks down, and you're off and away.

That's when you'll notice the handling. For some reason, car control just feels far too loose for a game that's all about maintaining control at high speeds. An option is available to adjust the sensitivity, but it only feels like a modifier that delays the time between you pressing a direction on the thumbstick and the controller turning in the extreme. Persistence reveals it as something that can be endured, and over time it may even become acceptable, but those first few races are equal parts frustration and confusion as you learn to adapt to the road.

This is compounded by the fact that Rockstar has populated its roads with scores of cars, busses, vans, limousines, and anything else with wheels and a motor. The place is crowded, is what we're saying – something that feels implemented simply because the power of the 360 allows it to be so. It's not particularly great from a racing genre standpoint, given that the map design does indeed accommodate the gameplay (city blocks often bleed into each other with nice wide corners), and even though that doesn't extend as far as we'd like – lampposts should be destructible, for instance – there's enough there to foster the speed. The traffic, however, often hampers it.

A few races under your belt will see you bestowed with various car abilities. Sure, there's the obligatory bullet-time power that slows things down and gives you extra time to react, but there's also a shockwave power that pushes the car ahead of you out of the way, one that makes you invincible and able to push opponents off the road with ease, and another one that disables their vehicle's electrical systems. As far as racing elements go they rank among the more supernatural, but they're nothing overly detrimental, and the fact that any car can choose any ability demonstrates desire on Rockstar's part to expand the formula, rather than repackaging DUB Edition under prettier visuals.

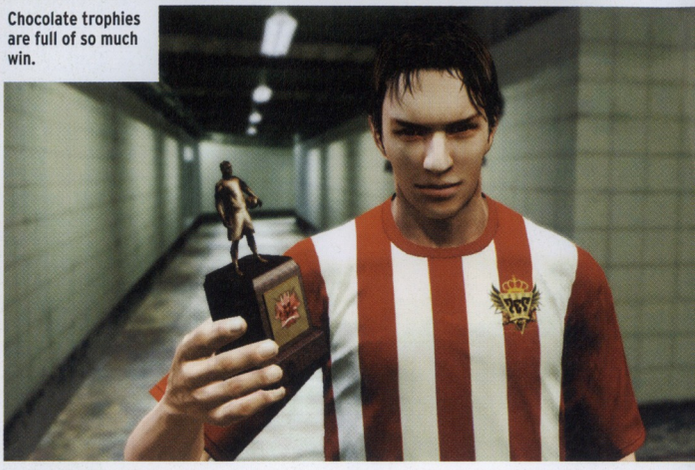
So, going back to our original question, does the same hold true for this latest iteration? Yes, it does. Midnight Club: Los Angeles is a great continuation of a solid series, and despite its occasional missteps it still stands as a solid product, offering enough change to the formula to warrant a purchase for followers, and a fine game for those discovering it for the first time. «

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Looks fantastic, great sense of speed, plenty of races, plenty of upgrades	Overly sensitive handling, lame dialogue, long climb up the upgrades tree	Solid gameplay that succeeds despite its quibbles, offering a racing experience that's likely to keep you busy for weeks.	8

Is that a little man hanging off the ball?

!!! Weather effects have a pronounced effect on ball handling in Pro Evo 09

Chocolate trophies are full of so much win.



Pro Evolution Soccer 2009

DIRK WATCH has the Hand of God

X360 | PS3 PC | PS2

category: **Soccer** / players: **1-4**
developer: **Konami**
publisher: **Konami**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **G**
available: **Now**

You're never too old to hit a pinata

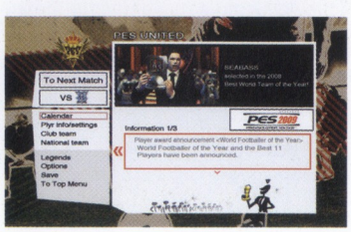
For a number of years now there has been quite a rivalry between the FIFA and Pro Evo franchises. FIFA has always held the stronger market position due to having a longer local history with gamers, but as far as critical acclaim went, for the most part the Pro Evo franchise had always held trumps. Of late that has been changing, and the divide between the two game franchises has thinned down to the barest of margins. It's no longer possible to point to one franchise or the other as the pinnacle of the football heap. More so than ever before it really comes down to personal choice.

Without a doubt the most interesting new addition to the Pro Evolution Soccer franchise in the 09 update is the new "Become a Legend" mode in which players can create a player from scratch and follow their career from bush-league minor teams all the way to the top of the sport. Although this game mode is quite similar to the FIFA "Be a Star" mode seen in FIFA 08, there are enough differences between the two modes that they can comfortably sit side by side in the hearts and minds of sports game fans.

HEH, BALL

As always the ball physics in Pro Evo 09 are second to none. The ball moves realistically in all situations – kicks, tackles, deflections, headers and what have you look about as realistically portrayed as possible. It's a bit of a shame that the same thing can't really be said about the AI. In a somewhat strange about face, the usually excellent AI of the Pro Evo franchise has become a little bit spotty. Teammate AI is excellent as usual, especially when it comes to timing passes and crosses, but on the lower difficulty levels the opponent AI is positively stupid, especially the goalkeepers, who seem to steadfastly refuse to do anything to get the ball out of the penalty area.

It feels very odd to be saying this (we have said almost the exact opposite on many occasions in the past), but the Pro Evo franchise really needs to take a leaf out of the FIFA book and try to evolve. Sure the game is still a heap of fun and there are some truly thrilling gameplay moments to be had, especially in the new "Become a Legend" mode, but Pro Evo 09, more than anything else, feels like an iterative update of the last Pro Evo game. A fairly good one to be sure, but unless next year's Pro Evo does something to reinvigorate the franchise, then FIFA may pull ahead again. «



THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Become a Legend mode is great fun, excellent ball physics throughout, good teammate AI	Goalies seem to be retarded at lower levels of difficulty, too similar to Pro Evo 08	A very good soccer game for the most part but Konami is going to have to pull out all the stops with the next Pro Evo	8

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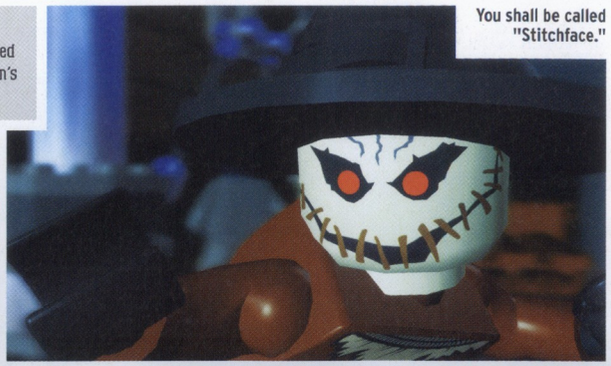
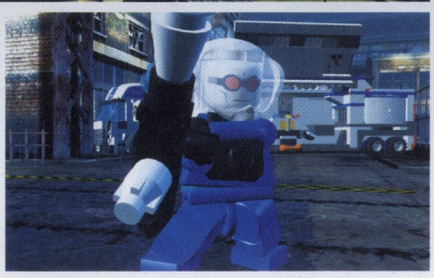
All of Batman's special costumes seem to be geared around combat while Robin's seem to be based around housework.



You shall be called "Stitchface."

From that angle it looks like... nah, too easy.



Lego Batman

Holy knobbly plastic, it's **RICO SUAVEZ**!

Unfortunately when it comes down to it, Lego Batman suffers the same way that Lego Indiana Jones did when it comes down to unlockables. While there are some memorable characters in both franchises – heroes and villains to fight alongside Batman in this case – there just aren't enough of those great characters to unlock. Aside from the central rogue's gallery and some peripheral characters like Commissioner Gordon, the bulk of unlockable characters fall under the category of Goon or Henchman, with the colour of their uniform being the only difference. It may sound like something of a petty gripe, but after being spoilt with all of the characters from Lego Star Wars, taking a step back just seems cruel. Anyway, Lego Batman sees the inhabitants of Arkham Asylum escaping and teaming up to do nefarious things, so it's up to the Bat and the Bird to foil their plans.

The general formula of Lego Batman remains consistent with other games in the Lego franchise, with the Caped Crusader and Boy Wonder bashing their way through levels, solving puzzles and every few levels fighting a boss pulled from the extensive Batman rogue's gallery. All of the big name villains are present – The Joker, Riddler, Penguin, Poison Ivy, Two Face, Clayface, Killer Croc and more, as is the silly and accessible controls and sense of humour that has lead the Lego games franchise to such success and longevity. Simply watching Clayfaces' antics during cutscenes is nearly worth the price of entry alone. Unfortunately, Lego Batman also suffers from all of the problems that have plagued the previous four games in the franchise – difficulty judging jumps, perspective and camera issues, terrible vehicle controls, fiddly puzzles, recursive death loops where the game respawns you in the act of falling off something and terrible enemy AI. The only thing that separates Lego Batman from other games in the Lego franchise is the addition of different outfits for Batman and Robin that give the two heroes access to extra powers integral to solving certain puzzles, but in reality these are only really a step away from the puzzles that could only be completed by certain characters in freeplay mode in the other games.

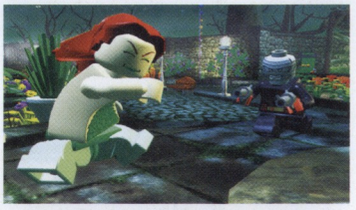
"I shall bet my ship to enter the pod race..."

ICE TO SEE YOU!

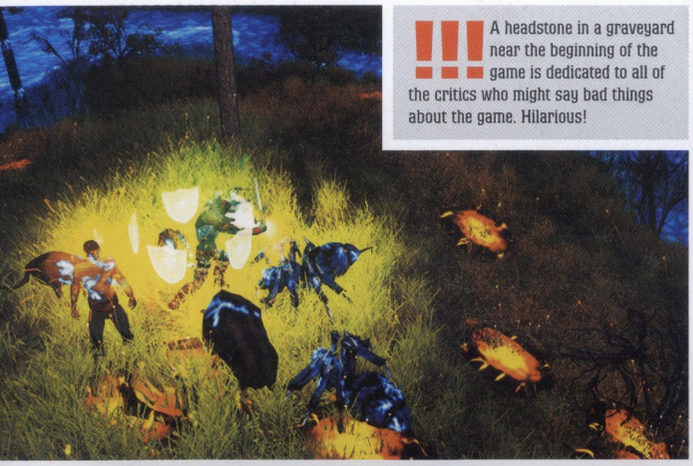
Lego Batman certainly looks good and plays well, even if the experience could be politely called "familiar". With the exception of the flaws that have plagued every game in the franchise, Lego Batman is definitely a decent game, with some nicely designed levels, some very funny moments, easy and accessible controls and some nice, if basic tweaks on the formula. That said, the game simply feels too much like the previous games in the Lego franchise to warrant much more than a rental by anyone who isn't either a huge fan of the Lego franchise (and stranger things have happened – we once got a letter from a person who adored Army Men games) or of Batman Himself. Undoubtedly there will be more Lego games coming in the future (the near future if the release timeline of the last few games is going to be adhered to) but we fervently hope that there will be some readjustment of the now rather stale formula by then. «

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

category: **Action**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Traveller's Tales**
publisher: **Warner Bros**
price: **$89.95** / rating: **M** / available: **Now**



THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Silly sense of humour, easy to grasp mechanics and controls, fun	Feels like a retread of previous Lego games, uninteresting unlockables, hard to judge jumps	A fun distraction but one that is unlikely to be remembered in the coming Christmas rush	**7**



!!! A headstone in a graveyard near the beginning of the game is dedicated to all of the critics who might say bad things about the game. Hilarious!

I'm not lion. It's a tiger. I can't bear it.

Sacred 2

DANIEL WILKS, To Me, Entire Division To Me, To Me, To Me

Recently Stardock announced "The Gamers Bill of Rights", a manifesto declaring a number of things players should expect from a PC game and the PC gaming industry in general. One of the main tenets of this bill is that gamers should have the right to demand that games be delivered in a finished state. While the exact meaning of "finished state" is not clearly defined, we believe it should be taken to mean that a game should ship to stores in a playable and balanced state, not as if it were still in beta testing. Obviously Deep Silver and Ascaron have a different definition of finished.

In its raw state, Sacred 2: Fallen Angel is a pretty broken experience. Some quests don't trigger or end, the mini-map is glitchy, the screen freezes for up to 30 seconds at random intervals and it crashes frequently. The 457Mb zero day patch goes some way to alleviating the problem – the mini-map works better and most of the quests trigger properly. The game still crashes and freezes, but now it does so more regularly and predictably, so that's something I suppose.

Wow, that's a little harsh. Maybe I should concentrate on the game's good points for a while. The world of Sacred 2 is huge and there's a hell of a lot to explore and kill. The sequel to one of the better Diablo clones to have reached the market, Sacred 2 offers players the chance to play one of six characters – various permutations of melee and magic classes – killing their way across a very large world following either a good or evil storyline. While the game does boast dual storylines the bulk of gameplay remains the same as players complete the same side quests and explore the same locations. The character classes are all quite interesting and a few, especially the Temple Guard and Seraphim, are quite novel.

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

category: **Action RPG** / players: **1+**
developer: **Deep Silver**
publisher: **Ascaron**
price: **$89.95**
rating: **M** / available: **Now**

MULE'S BUTT

Anyone who has played an action RPG before should be able to pick up the mechanics and controls within a few minutes. Quests are generally quite fun with the exception of any quest that involves working with or escorting an NPC. Without exception the NPCs are astoundingly stupid and suicidal, running at random mobs as soon as they appear on the edge of the map and then screaming that they're in danger. Being punished for stupid AI behaviour is never fun.

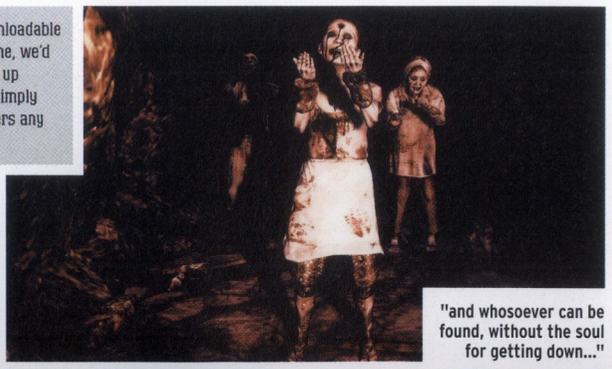
While the game world looks great, the actual character models are universally pretty ugly, the Inquisitor being the homeliest of the bunch. The voice acting is amongst the worst we have ever heard, with stilted delivery of nonsensical, often post-modern, self-referential dialogue. Hearing a rogue you've just murdered claiming that "I know where you parked your car, gamer", or "I knew I was just an extra" is a sure way to kill any immersion in the game world, as is hearing every soldier screaming "Entire division to me" or some permutation thereof with such mind-numbing regularity that it sounds like a voice sample from some bad early 90s dance track.

If it were stable, Sacred 2: Fallen Angel could have been a great game – the world is huge and there's lots to explore and loot drops are frequent and interesting. If you have patience and a willingness to hit the quick save button every few minutes so you don't lose too much ground when the game inevitably crashes, then you'll probably have a great time. If that's not you then you'll probably have to start counting sleeps until Diablo III. «

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Huge nice looking world, quite interesting character classes, easy to grasp mechanics	Unstable, feels unfinished, incredibly stupid AI, nonsensical dialogue, horrible voice acting	Let's hope the console versions of the game ship in a much more finished state	6

Would you go in there? I wouldn't go in there.

!!! Contrary to the downloadable intentions of the game, we'd suggest that picking up the retail disc is the way to go, simply because no episode by itself offers any kind of fulfilling experience.



"and whosoever can be found, without the soul for getting down..."

Siren: Blood Curse

BLAARRGHHHH DARREN WELLS RAAAWWWRRRR...

The Japanese sure have a knack for making horror. In film or in videogame, the vibe that the East puts forth manages to pack in more creep than anything Hollywood has produced. It's just the way things are, and no amount of masked slashers stalking gasping teen girls will ever change that.

The sense of the macabre is something that has worked quite well for Konami's Silent Hill series, and it's used in a very similar way in Siren: Blood Curse, an episodic offering that Sony hopes will ignite the PSN service. Considering that all the episodes are in fact finished and ready to go, the word "episodic" may be a misnomer – at the very least, any advantages offered by the delivery model are undermined, since there's no possibility that player feedback will influence how future episodes are constructed. Nevertheless, it's available for those who couldn't be stuffed popping down to the shops to buy it. For those who can, a retail disc will be offered, containing all 12 episodes for $49.95. To see a new release game at such a low price point is a disappointing rarity, and it's something that Blood Curse must be commended for right off the bat.

The game itself? Well...

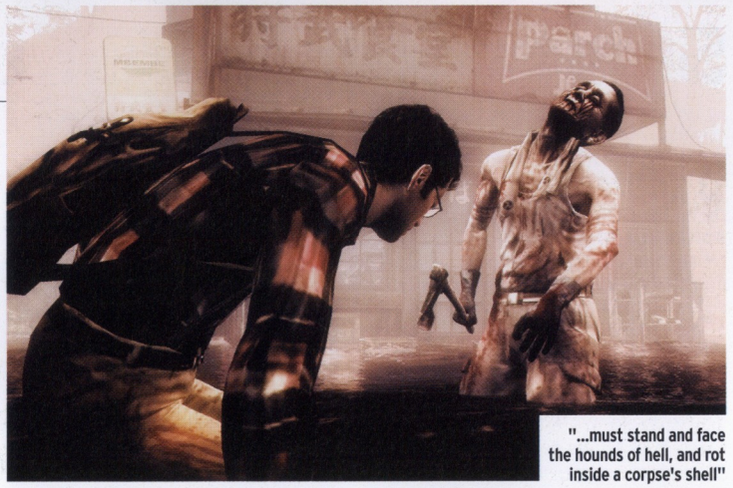
Even though the visual similarities between Silent Hill and Siren: Blood Curse might be many, there's a cavernous distance between the effectiveness of the overall product. Yes, the game looks great, and characters come with a pleasing amount of detail (blood and flesh actually seem to have substance), but it's paired with a control scheme that's occasionally clumsy and gameplay that misses as much as it hits.

PS3

category: **Action** / players: **1**
developer: **SCE Japan**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$49.95** / rating: **MA15+**
available: **Now**

BOO (URNS)

Take the very first episode. The introductory screen gives you your mission but kneecaps the shock – telling you to "escape the policeman" doesn't exactly make a secret of what's going to give you the scare. The second episode casts you as another character, and when you happen upon a track shift lever in an abandoned mine, the game tells you that "you can't use this yet". The sporadic rounds of Protect the NPC have not evolved beyond an era that bestowed them with limited pathfinding skills, the free-look camera is a tad too restricting, and instances that see a character jump down from a ledge curiously forget to perform any sort of animation whatsoever.



"...must stand and face the hounds of hell, and rot inside a corpse's shell"

But it's when things work that the game shows potential. The moment where you're a small girl escaping a handful of zombies – sorry, Shibito – offers an atmosphere that's tense and unnerving. The lighting casts just enough shadows to raise suspicion at the slightest movement, the guttural groans of the enemy are chilling, and the fact that you're an unarmed child rather than a beefed-up action man gives things a nice twist.

The sightjacking ability contributes to this part of the way, but then stops short when it impinges on the gameplay. Hitting R2 sends your character into a pseudo trance and allows you target an enemy, lock onto them, and see through their eyes. The television real estate is cut in half, allowing you to control your own character on the left and monitor the baddie on the right. There's a wealth of tactical possibilities here, but the noticeable framerate chug, which the engine seems to compensate for by painting a feint haze over the visuals, undermines them all. It sullies the innovation and tarnishes the experience.

While it doesn't emerge as a particularly memorable or important game, Siren: Blood Curse nevertheless offers a semi-decent horror title, provided its various niggles can be endured. «

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Decent value for money, some genuinely creepy moments, detailed visuals	Needlessly episodic, performance issues while sightjacking, initial levels far too dark, troublesome NPC AI	Flawed to the point of occasional frustration, but the experience and the price go some way towards making up for it.	6

There are Spidey symbols hidden all over the vast city to find and collect.

Rhino-surfing: the new "in" thing

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

DIRK WATCH catches thieves, just like flies

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS

category: **Action** / players: **1**
developer: **Treyarch/Shaba Games**
publisher: **Activision**
price: **$89.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

We loved the first two Treyarch developed Spider-Man: The Movie games. They were great, featuring some fantastic web-swinging action, good combat and nice looks. Then came Spider-Man: The Movie 3. Much like with the movie itself, we were left scratching our heads thinking "What the hell happened?". We're happy to say that after the huge disappointment of Spidey 3, Treyarch, along with Shaba Games has managed to rein things back in and deliver a Spider-Man game that, although not without problems, is still pretty damn kick-arse and thankfully not constrained by the plot of another movie.

Although the action revolves around villains and a fight against Venom, the real hinge of Web of Shadows is Spider-Man fighting against himself, or, more precisely, Peter Parker fighting against the desire to use the Black Suit. At any time during the game, players can swap between traditional red and blue suit Spidey and Black Suit Spider-Man. Each costume has its own attacks and special abilities. Traditional Spidey is an agile fighter that uses fast combos, whereas Black Suit Spider-Man is a blunt force, delivering far heavier blows. Traditional Spider-Man incapacitates foes with web balls. Black Suit Spider-Man can throw cars around. Traditional Spidey regenerates health fast outside of combat. Black Suit regains health by beating people up. Each suit features skill trees to increase melee, ranges and special abilities and how much the player tends to favour one suit or the other can influence the direction of the game – play with the Black Suit more and villains will come to Spider-Man's aid rather than heroes.

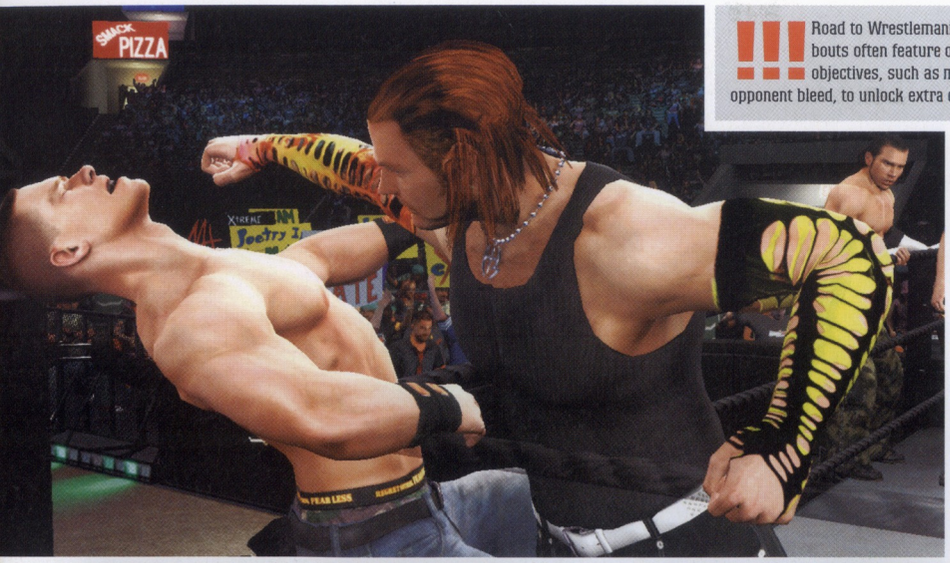
SWINGERS

Web swinging feels much like it has in previous Spider-Man games – fantastic. The combat is very good as well. Spider-Man has access to a number of powers and combos from the start of the game but can learn more throughout the course of the adventure by doing training exercises (courtesy of Luke Cage, Powerman) and through spending experience. Spidey can detect enemies using his Spider Sense and can lock on to individual enemies. The most striking of Spider-Man's new abilities is his skill at being able to lock on, web-zip to and attack enemies on the ground or in the air.

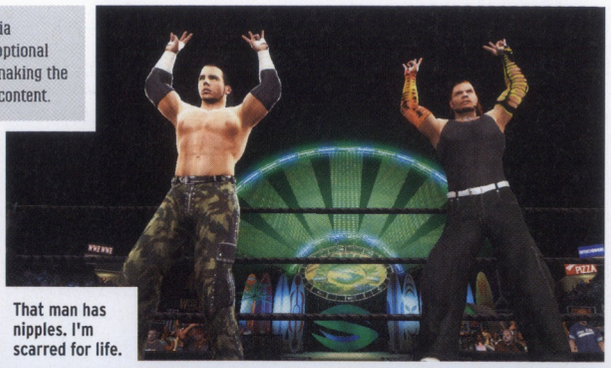
"Eyes up here, Spidey... eyes up here..."

The major problem with Spider-Man: Web of Shadows is the camera. It really doesn't seem up to the task of keeping up with the action. You could be forgiven for thinking that the fact that Webhead now features the (long overdue in our opinion) ability to lock onto a target would negate most of the camera problems, but paradoxically, it seems to cause a lot of them. Spidey moves fast and in a rather unpredictable way. He swings, can climb or run up walls, can web-zip from one object to another and fights like an angry pinball, bouncing from one target to another in a flurry of arms and legs. The poor camera just can't seem to keep up some of the time. This is especially true when fighting on walls. If you engage in combat while climbing a wall the camera does its best to find a good angle to show both the battle field and the enemy but after a short while it's easy to become disoriented as you move and leap around – it's all too easy to lose track of what is wall, what is roof and what is ground. «

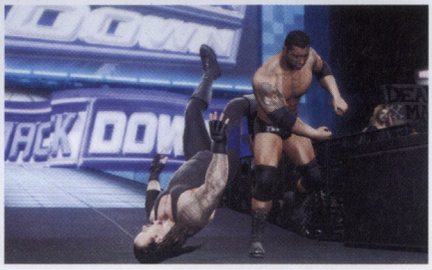
THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Great web swinging, fast paced and fun combat, Venom, new look Vulture	Camera sometimes can't keep up, Spider-Man's snappy one liners not too snappy	Spider-Man is back in a fun super heroic romp	8

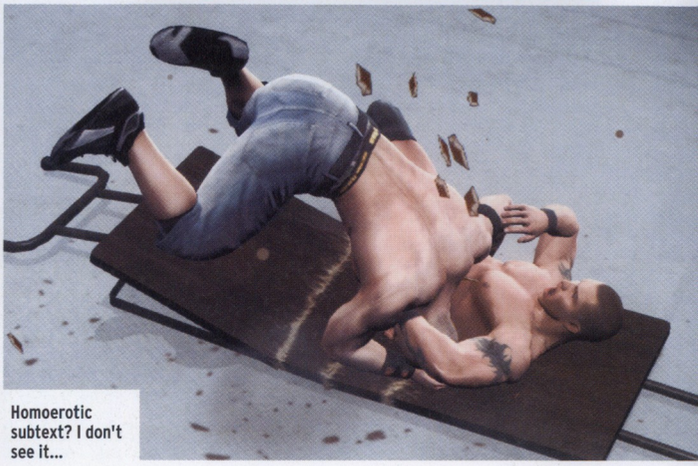


Road to Wrestlemania bouts often feature optional objectives, such as making the opponent bleed, to unlock extra content.



That man has nipples. I'm scarred for life.





Homoerotic subtext? I don't see it...

Smackdown Vs. Raw 2009

YURI SPADEFACE likes sweaty men

Wrestling games sure have come a long way in a fairly short period of time. Gone are the days of simple brawling with a few buttons in front of a barely animated 2D crowd. Nowadays the WWE brand is a complex beast, with very technical controls, umpteen options, state of the art character creation, a swag of wrestlers to play and unlock and tons of bonus content. To be sure, WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2009 is a yearly iteration of a long-standing franchise, but it's also a pretty darn good one.

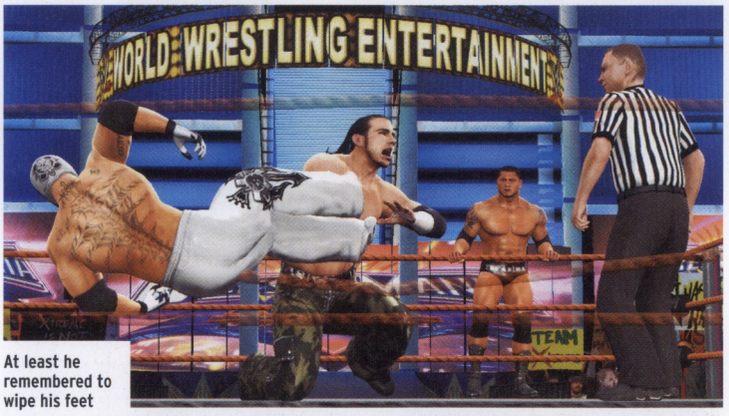
Smackdown Vs. Raw 2009 further refines the control scheme introduced in last year's WWE game, namely having most wrestling moves keyed to the right thumbstick. The control scheme gives the player a lot more options in a match as compared to the old button based format. Each direction on the right thumbstick is keyed to a different move. Holding down the left bumper modifies the attacks to be more powerful. Performing a grapple whilst moving performs a different move again. The position of the opponent's body – face on, belly to back, opponent prone – modifies what move is performed as well. It's an incredibly detailed system that is very simple to pickup and play.

There isn't that much in evidence that distinguishes Smackdown Vs. Raw 2009 from Smackdown Vs. Raw 2008 to the naked eye. Without doubt we will get letters from fans of the franchise pointing out how different the games are and calling for our heads, but before you work up a head of steam you need to realise that we don't mean that in a bad way. The WWE franchise has been consistently good for a while now, with tons of options and gameplay modes for players to sink their teeth into. The character customisation options are still some of the best in gaming, and the roster of "superstars" (say what you like, calling every wrestler a superstar does devalue the title somewhat) is comprehensive enough that all but the most ardent of WWE fanboys should be happy. Will it convert new players to the joys of the wrestling game? Probably not, but that said, it's still a blast. Making a truly hideous character, giving it a woman's nickname and winning the world heavyweight title is always a laugh.

Now for a little whine: the Road to Wrestlemania mode (the story mode if you will) is something of a disappointment. Not due to gameplay – the mode plays as well as the rest of the game – but more due to the fact that the story absolutely railroads the player in cutscenes. Sure, we know that wrestling is scripted and fake, but after squarely trouncing an opponent, making them bleed, getting a three count and generally obliterating them, the announcers in the next cutscene comment on how you seemed weak and vulnerable in the ring. Would it really have been so difficult to have a few different versions of the dialogue, depending on how well the player performed? «

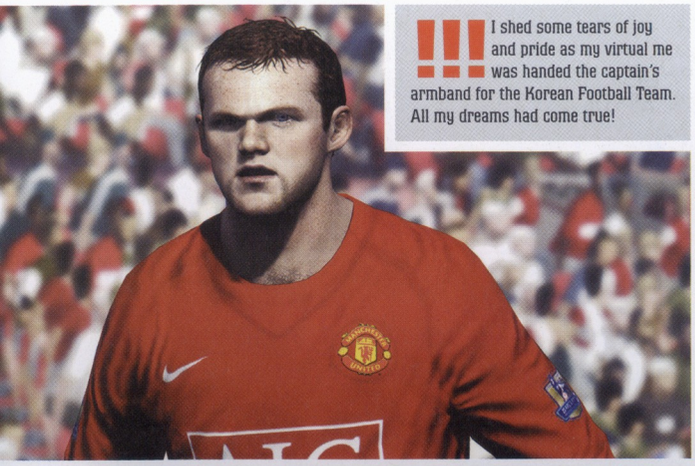
X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

category: **Wrestling** / players: **1-4**
developer: **Yuke's Media Creations**
publisher: **THQ**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

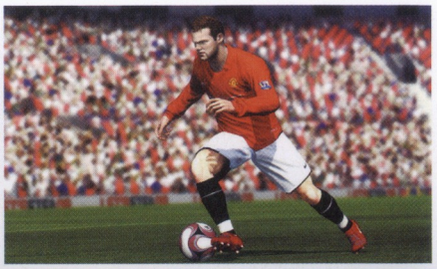


At least he remembered to wipe his feet

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Intricate character creation, flexible controls, huge character roster, tons of unlockables	Some control issues, some clipping issues, and storyline railroads players	A strong franchise remains worthy, despite its bugbears and storyline vs gameplay oversights	7



I shed some tears of joy and pride as my virtual me was handed the captain's armband for the Korean Football Team. All my dreams had come true!



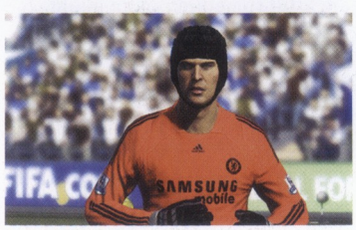
I'm just like Jesus, but not in a sacriligeous way

FIFA 09

Kick it to **AMOS HONG**!

While the FIFA series has had its many fans over the years, with its superior graphics and licenses for the major leagues, it has lagged behind the Pro Evolution Soccer series in terms of gameplay. It now seems that the 09 model may have surpassed the competition, with improved gameplay that translates to a fun and addictive title.

Gone are the clunky and unresponsive controls of past FIFA games. Players can now jostle with each other for the ball while it's in the air, or even while running for it – a pretty good feature that incorporates what goes on a soccer pitch. Heading has perhaps seen the most improvement: Instead of just pressing a button and waiting for the animation to kick in and make contact with the ball, players will need to time their button pressing. Press it too early or late, and the controlled player will take a massive air swing. The jostling and heading work in tandem in the game, as you'll first jostle to get the better position when the ball is kicked to you, then time the header perfectly so you can pass the ball in front of a charging team mate.



PS3

category: **Sports** / players: **1-7**
developer: **EA Sports**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$99.95**
rating: **G** / available: **Now**

The AI is smarter when it comes to making decisions with defending and attacking. It will now gesture for you to pass the ball when it is in the clear. With these improvements, the AI now feels more like a teammate, rather than an onlooker.

The FIFA series has always been superb when it comes to the graphics, and this year is no different. The player and stadium models are realistic, with the player animations bringing them to life. With a plethora of gestures and the attention to detail, the game is beautiful to watch.

LEAGUEY GOODNESS

A strong point of the FIFA series has been the licenses, and with an abundance of leagues, such as the Premier League, Serie A and the A-League, FIFA 09 doesn't disappoint. There are also over 40 international sides, such as England, Australia and – my personal favourite – South Korea.

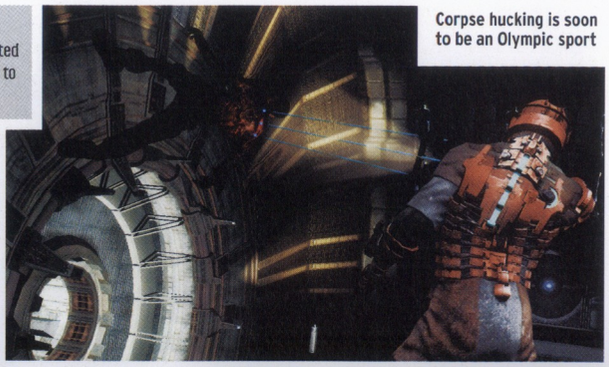
The addition of the Be A Pro: Seasons mode alone is worth the price of the game; it's highly addictive. The idea behind Be A Pro is simple: choose or create a player turn him into a legend on the pitch. The 09 version is a lot meatier, as players will grind their way through four seasons. Help is provided by indicators that assist with positioning, threats and overall rating. After each game, experience points are earned, which are then used on abilities. Extra points are achieved for certain objectives, which add extra incentives to the games. A negative is that the objectives, which include ones such as "Score 2 Goals" and Take 10 Shots", favours the player that plays attacking positions. Along with only being able to play four seasons, it's the only downside to this mode.

Another addition is the Adidas Live Season, which allows for updates of the players stats during the season. If a certain player is on fire, this is reflected in the stats of that player in the game, useful for when playing against friends or online.

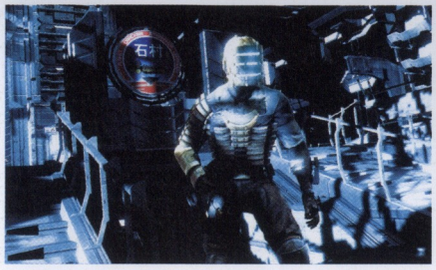
The FIFA series has now developed into a fantastic game, with 09 being probably the best yet. With the highly enjoyable Be A Pro: Seasons mode, and much improved gameplay, this title has many positives. «

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Smooth and fun to play, Be A Pro mode, an enjoyable experience overall.	Can only play through four seasons, no significant improvements in the Manager Mode from last year.	FIFA 09 is a fast and fun game to play, and a definite improvement over past installments.	9

!!! A six-book comic series and an animated prequel movie serve to add to Dead Space's backstory.



Corpse hucking is soon to be an Olympic sport



Don't shoot it in the head! Target the incredibly squishy limbs!

Dead Space

DARREN WELLS shoots to kill

Some personal bias might have crept into my decision to review Dead Space. As a fan of 2002's The Thing, the idea of going back to the same action/horror vibe, but replacing cold snow with creaking steel, held some appeal, and the prospect of laying some lead into bleeding wrecks of flesh was one that I figured Dead Space could effortlessly offer.

Indeed it does. Blood sprays in vicious jets, enemies wail in terror – and again in pain – and heads can be squishily stomped beneath your weighty space boot. The slaughter even comes with its own bullet-point: "strategic dismemberment". Headshots mean little, so you've got to de-limb your foe – starting at the bits that move it and bite you, and working inwards – before finishing it for good. So with the game offering strategic depth and buckets of gore, at least two camps of audience have their interest piqued. So far, so good.

But things take a turn when the rest of the game is examined. The clichés, the horror staples, the generic vibe, the out of place sections that turn a console game into a PC game and a PC game into a console game... each of these elements on their own would normally be mere niggles, but to see them all worming their way through the one game brings down an otherwise solid concept.

I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS

Things start off strong, with the game confidently looking to establish a true sense of the macabre. Your teammates tiptoe into an abandoned ship – the Ishimura – with a genuine sense of confusion and foreboding; they curiously examine the leftovers in a manner that conveys true bewilderment. Then look at the protagonist's name: Isaac Clarke. And his reason for heading to the Ishimura? To rescue his girlfriend. And what does the Ishimura look like? Every abandoned spaceship in science-fiction history. And... and... and... and it keeps snowballing into a bundle of elements that Hollywood has long recognised as tired, but Dead Space is determined to make work.

The first mission is pretty much redundant, as – spoilers! – after you've spent about half an hour fetching this and fetching that in an effort to fix your battered ship, you head back to power it up, only to have it promptly go ka-blammo. It's only then the game confirms that, yes, you're stranded, and shifts gears into investigating what happened on the ill-fated mining vessel.

Once that's underway, the act of limb-blasting the nasties soon emerges as the game's main feature, as everything else can be performed on autopilot. Fetch this, fix that, go here, open this... they're the types of tasks that games have incorporated for years, albeit with a lick of new blood/paint. The exterior locales warrant particular mention for their visual awe – moments where you're navigating the outside of the ship are presented against a space backdrop that's truly spectacular – but that's about the extent of their role in the level. The zero-grav sections also serve to mix things up, even if their presence makes that purpose blindingly obvious.

Then there's the way that tasks waver between platform suitability. Given that Dead Space is headed to the PC as well as the consoles, it's perhaps understandable that the developers were looking to make sure that both camps were catered to, but it comes at the expense of crippling one to favour the other. Take the "shoot the asteroids with the sentry gun" mission. Playing it on the 360 requires a superhuman amount of precision: moving the reticule with the thumbstick is slow and inaccurate, revealing it as a task that's more suited to the PC's mouse and keyboard layout. And too bad if you want to adjust the stick sensitivity or change the overall control scheme – save for inverting the X and Y axes, you're unable to modify the buttons.

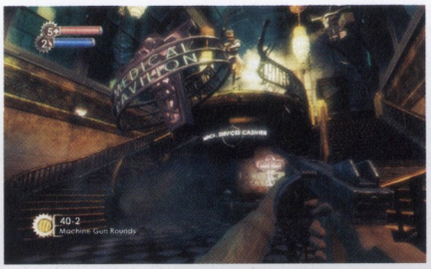
While the basic core of Dead Space is solid enough to enjoy, the myriad niggles simply get in the way. If you're not fussed about an overwhelming dose of the generic and just want to shoot some enemies into goo, the game can potentially satisfy, but those who are after something more might wish to look elsewhere. «

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

category: **Action**
players: **1-2**
developer: **EA Redwood Shores**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **MA15+** / available: **Now**

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Capable graphics, satisfying combat, decent tech tree for weapons and suit, nice sense of scope when outside	Generic, no option to change control scheme, wayward mission design, overly "gamey" level structure	Solid but severely flawed. Strategic dismemberment is noteworthy, everything else... not so much.	6

"A man chooses. A slave obeys." Sage advice from Andrew Ryan.



"That guy's gonna get an arse full of pipe-wrench!"

BioShock

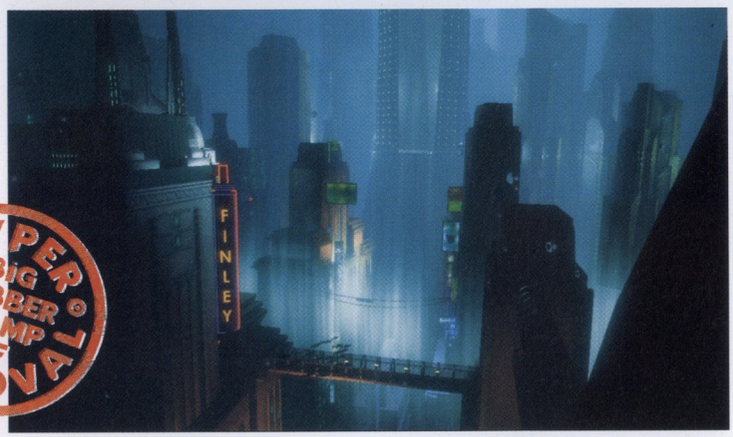
DARREN WELLS is entitled to the sweat of his brow

Haven't played BioShock yet? Oh man, where have you been? It was only of the best singleplayer games of 2007, and served to demonstrate just how much power a game has in telling a compelling story while offering gameplay that advances its genre.

It sold like gangbusters upon release for the PC and 360 platforms, but PS3 owners were left in the cold. Now, finally, 2K Marin has taken the work of 2K Boston and 2K Australia (so many 2Ks!) to bring BioShock to Sony's console.

PS3

category: **FPS** / players: **1**
developer: **2K Boston/Australia**
publisher: **2K Studios**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **MA15+**
available: **Now**



HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

DIVE IN

None of the magic has faded. BioShock was, and still is, an amazing achievement, and no element that contributed to its success has been lost in translation. Not having played the game since its initial release, going back to it on the PS3 served to remind what a fantastic game it is, and even though we've already been there and played that, we found ourselves wrapped as tightly in the PS3 version as we were on day one. From the opening plane crash right through to the end credits, BioShock offers an experience that engages every step of the way.

But time has birthed some criticisms, such as the game's use of Vita-Chambers. These tubes respawn the player upon death and allows them to continue right where they left off, as opposed to hitting that Quick Load key. However, an option is available to turn the chambers off, so those who feel that the system is too much of a gimme can set things back to a more traditional shooter feel. Sadly, the Little Sisters mechanic that determines what ending you see has not been addressed. Even if you redeem your ways after harvesting two or three, you're still declared to be worse than Hitler by the game's end. Although we wish things weren't that black and white, it's but a minor niggle in an otherwise fine game.

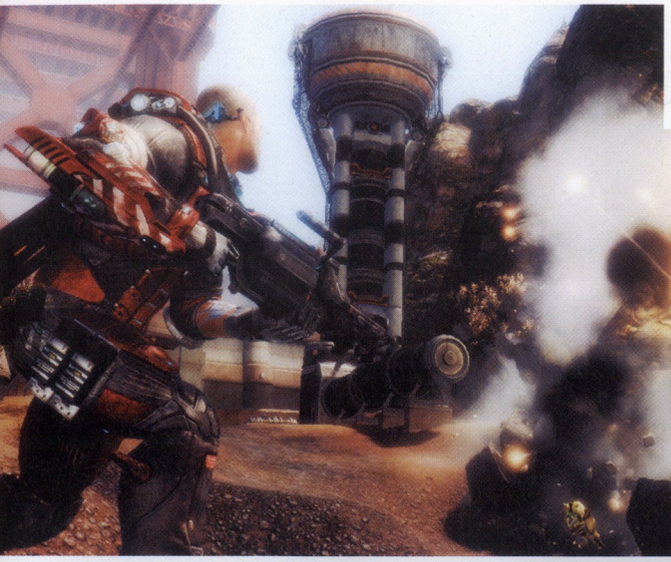
SHOW ME THE EXTRAS

So what about the extra scraps that have been thrown Sony's way? Well, the downloadable tonics and plasmids that were offered over Xbox Live Arcade are in the game from the start. There's a new – and significantly tougher – difficulty mode called Survivor. The game has PS3 trophy support, a few bonus videos are available for viewing from the main menu, and challenge rooms are offered as downloadable content that are said to offer "a couple of additional hours of gameplay". While said downloadable content wasn't even available at the time of writing, the extras still don't go towards making a great game even better – in fact, they seem added as an obligatory gesture. This is by no means a "definitive" version of the game – dual-platform gamers who already own BioShock on the 360 or PC won't need to buy it again on the PS3, so stow your pennies.

From a hardware perspective, the game has little worries. Although the frame rate appears to be slightly better on the PS3 than on the 360 version, there's a mandatory install that lasts upwards of ten minutes. But thereafter it's relatively smooth sailing, and the load times between levels are on a par with any other game of its ilk.

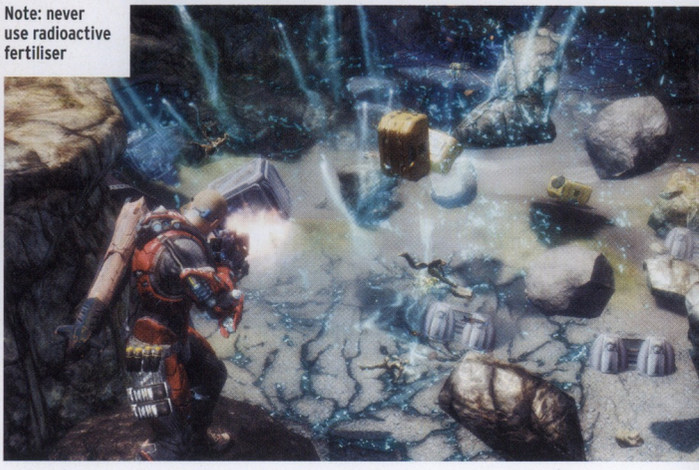
While the game disappoints on the extras front, BioShock will still present a fantastic singleplayer game to the dedicated few who had the steely resolve to wait. «

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Excellent game, solid framerate	Long install time, meaningless extras	It's BioShock on the PS3. Enough said.	9



!!! Names more manly than Jet Brody: Powers Boothe, Dick Pound, Master Sargent Max Fightmaster, Darren Wells...

Quick! Dig a hole! Then the rocks will ha--CRASH!



Note: never use radioactive fertiliser

Fracture

DIRK WATCH dug a hole

The year is 2161 and things, to put it politely, have turned to poo. Environmental disaster has caused humanity to bootstrap itself to the next level of evolution to survive. The Atlantic Alliance has turned to technology as their vehicle for success and the Republic of Pacifica have opted to use advanced genetic engineering to survive and prosper, forever leaving the two sides at loggerheads. As the game begins, the President outlaws extreme genetic modification. Understandably this pisses off the leader of the Pacificans, General Nathan Sheridan, who, along with his no longer quite human cohorts, decides to take down the Alliance. It's up to the rather alpha-male named Jet Brody to put down the resistance and sort things out. Just between you and me, though, if the President (or K-Rudd) outlawed my way of surviving environmental disaster, I would probably get all shooty too.

Fracture has one main selling point – the ability to raise and lower the ground at will either by using a tool called the Entrencher or via three grenades that raise the ground, leave a crater or raise a thin spire of stone and earth into the air. Initially the ability to change the terrain is thrilling, but after the first few levels some cracks begin to show. While it is true that players have access to the Entrencher at all times, there are not many situations in which the use of the Entrencher has not been specifically scripted. Sure, being able to throw up a mound of dirt for instant cover during a fire fight is both useful and impressive, but players cannot affect any kind of man-made structure or stone, so during the indoor sections (and there are a lot of them), coming across a small patch of dirt in the corner of a room inevitably means that it's time to pull out the Entrencher and begin to shift some earth. While I'm loathe to compare one game to another, Fracture reminds us a lot of Red Faction in the fact that it gives players really impressive toys but essentially prescribes when and how they are used. Like Red Faction, however, Fracture has a strong concept and some great mechanics so we hope that we'll see another in the franchise with more freedom.

Not shown: white wireframe spaceship

SOILS OF WAR

Multi-player fares a little better with up to 12 players fighting their way across eight maps over eight game modes. Game modes feature new spins of tried and true styles and for the most part allow players to use their terrain modding abilities at will. The action can get a little hectic and confusing due to the fact that the levels deform rather quickly leaving terrain unrecognisable, but it's still pretty fast paced and fun.

Fracture isn't a bad game by any stretch of the imagination but it does come across as both generic and undercooked. The terrain modding abilities given to the player are amazing but the fact that for the most part the player is all but told how to use them takes away their novelty and without them the game feels like pretty much any other post-Halo third person shooter – recharging shield, can only carry two weapons at a time and all. Still, there are enough good ideas in Fracture that we would like to revisit the franchise some time down the track. Hopefully if there is a second outing players will have much more freedom to use the Entrencher, the enemy AI will be far less brain-dead and the look of the game will be a little more unique. «

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

category: **Third Person Shooter**
players: **1-12**
developer: **Day 1 Studios**
publisher: **LucasArts**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **M** / available: **Now**

THE GOOD	THE BAD	HYPER VERDICT	
Terrain deformation technology is fantastic; multi-player is quite fun, some nice level design	Little freedom to use terrain deformation, dumb enemy AI, repetitive, feels overly generic	Fracture isn't going to set the world on fire but it does have a strong concept worthy of a sequel.	6

Golden Axe: Beast Rider

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

category: **Action** / players: **1**
developer: **Secret Level** / publisher: **Sega**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **MA 15+** / available: **Now**

Golden Axe is a title that carries a hell of a lot of nostalgic longing for a lot of people. The side scrolling hack 'em up was one of the legitimately great games that made the leap from arcade to console relatively unscathed. It's a pity it couldn't go through the remake process as comfortably.

Instead of having the choice of playing one of three characters, the remake limits the choice to a single female character in what seems to be a rather cynical attempt to make a dull game appealing through the addition of boobs. And dull it is, with the player hacking and slashing their way across some superficially pretty but otherwise quite dull linear environments, using some very basic melee combos and occasionally riding a beast that is more of a detriment to combat that an asset due to their relatively slow movement speed, clumsy handling and slow, ungainly attacks. Quite a disappointment when you consider the name of the game.

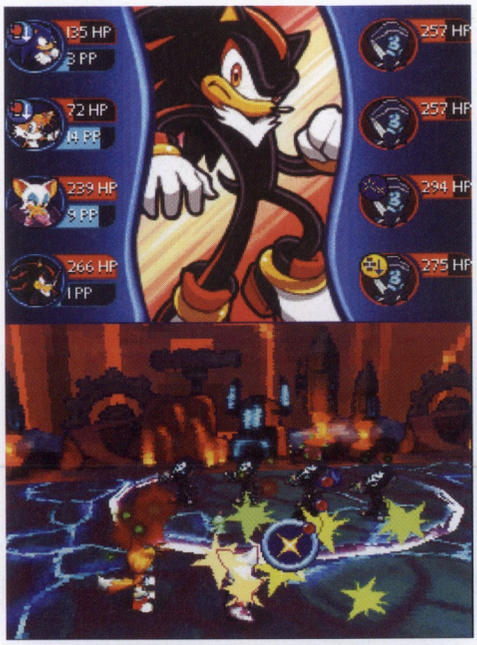
On a technical level, Golden Axe Beat Rider is also a something of a mess. During the time with the game we noticed the soundtrack skipping or hitching on multiple occasions, frequent texture tearing, multiple occasions of the camera occluding the action and worst of all, numerous occasions upon which the entire game froze for a few seconds. While we're used to such problem in early code, the fact that our review copy of Beast Rider was retail code makes it so much worse.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

A total waste of a good franchise.

4



Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

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

category: **RPG** / players: **1-2**
developer: **Bioware** / publisher: **Sega**
price: **$69.95**/ rating: **G** / available: **Now**

Sonic's transition to the RPG genre had so much potential – the bright colours, the cutesy characters, the established back story – it was like Sega already had an RPG designed for them. All they had to do was make sure it had decent gameplay – something they failed to do.

The game begins while Sonic is on holiday after defeating Doctor Eggman. News is received that Knuckles has been kidnapped, so you, playing as Sonic, join forces with Tails and a bunch of regulars to find your knuckly friend.The concept is simple enough – run around collecting things and battling enemies – and this is the exact sort of thing that should be oodles of pointless fun. Except, it's not.

The controls are awkward inasmuch that you can't use the D-pad to control your character. Everything rests on the stylus, which makes moving Sonic at fast speeds to collect rings a rather clumsy affair. Battles are also a chore because half the time you will be ambushed by an armidillo or a swarm of bees that, midway through battle, will run away from you. Rather than let them go and continue on your adventure, you are obliged to chase them down and defeat them. This chase is, essentially, pointless, because you have no control over where or how fast you run. You just inevitably catch up with the enemy and have to resume battle. What a waste of time. Why include a chase at all?

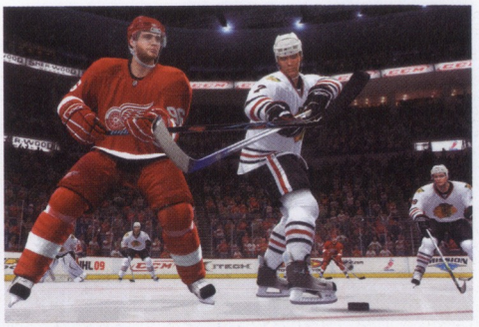
Battles are a cross between Pokemon and Final fantasy-styled combat, but they're uninspired and one would be more inclined to just avoid them altogether. However, the cost of doing this is that your characters don't level-up and you will find yourself dead in later levels and have to start the game again. Why would anyone want to do that?

TRACEY LIEN

HYPER VERDICT

This is about as fun as an aneurysm.

4



NHL '09

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

category: **Sports** / players: **1-7**
developer: **EA Sports** / publisher: **EA Sports**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **PG** / available: **Now**

Much like its soccer counterparts (FIFA, we're looking at you), the NHL franchise is an example of evolution by numbers. If you remember NHL 08 and how that played out, NHL 09 will hold few surprises.

This latest edition brings a handful of new moves to the mix, including protect puck and lift stick. Protect puck allows you to shield the puck with your body, making it that much trickier for an opponent to steal possession. Lift stick is a great move, timed correctly, and allows you to lift the stick (gasp!) of an opponent as they go to receive a pass.

The 'Be a Pro' feature puts you in the skates of a third-line AHL player intent on making it to the big time. In this mode, you control your young hopeful and the AI handles the rest of the team. The coach judges performance over 60 categories and falling short of his standards might mean a premature trip to the market.

The major draw card for the franchise is the realistic modelling of teams and players. Based on the '08 season, EA have fed in serious amounts of data, from team performance to injuries, hot streaks and line combinations.

NHL 09 is so realistic, the developers have gone so far as to include the horribly banal, incessant squawking of the commentators. It's more painful than a puck to the face and it is hard/impossible to resist the temptation to turn them off A-Sap.

The quest for realism means the controls can be fiddly, especially for the uninitiated. Thankfully for the old school out there, this latest instalment includes NHL 94 controls. Two buttons good!

JETHRO POWDERKEG

HYPER VERDICT

After so many years there really isn't much room for innovation.

7

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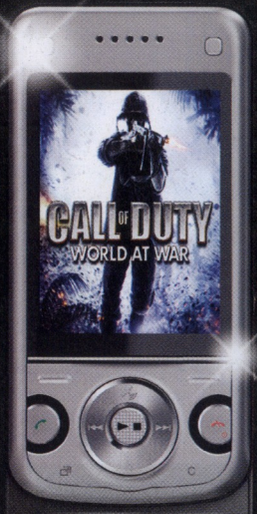
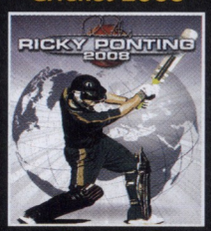
Call Of Duty World At War



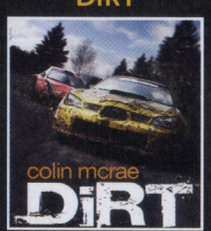
Ricky Ponting Cricket 2008



The Dark Knight

Who Wants To Be A Millionaire 3rd Edition

Colin McRae DiRT



Transformers G1 Awakening

■ Often the problem with mobile phone games is that they try to be too ambitious for what the limited control scheme allows. Most action games suffer due to the small buttons on most modern phones and woe betide anyone with large fingers. You won't face that problem with Transformers G1, as the game utilises a turn-based format that definitely suits the mobile platform. Control Optimus Prime, Bumblebee and a host of other Transformers characters from the original Generation 1 Transformers as you battle to retrieve the fabled Allspark.

The game features both a Story mode with up to 17 episodes based on the original animated series, as well as a Skirmish mode in which players can battle as either Autobots or Decepticons. The turn-based rounds are played on an isometric battleground whereas attack animations are shown in 3D cutscenes. All Transformers can transform between their robot and vehicle forms; vehicle forms allow the Transformers to move further at the expense of not being able to attack. Controls are simple and well suited to the mobile platform. All in all not a bad little time waster.

DEVELOPER: GLU MOBILE • **PUBLISHER:** GLU MOBILE • **AVAILABLE:** ALL AUSTRALIAN CARRIERS

Spore Origins Mobile

Inset: the iPhone version

■ Spore is a game about creating a life form and guiding it through evolutionary steps. On PC it's a very ambitious game, featuring a single celled stage, a creature stage, in which your creation takes to the land, and various stages in which the creatures develop culture, economy and science. Spore Origins is not quite so ambitious, as it concerns itself only with the single celled evolution of the player's creature.

Gameplay is simple – players use the phone keypad to move around their small, single celled creature in an effort to eat enough smaller creatures to progress to the next level whilst simultaneously avoiding being eaten by larger, more dangerous single celled organisms. Between levels players can modify the look and structure of their creature, adding weapons, mouths and other attributes necessary for survival.

Controls are simple and limited to directional control but some phones, such as the Motorola MotoRazr2 V9, can make for some pretty clumsy gameplay as the controls are clustered closely together and are too small to allow for the precision necessary for eating smaller creatures without being eaten in turn. Spore Origins is also available on iPhone and iPod Touch.

DEVELOPER: EA MOBILE • **PUBLISHER:** EA MOBILE
AVAILABLE: EA MOBILE

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Christmas Buyer's Guide

Having trouble working out what to get a loved one (or yourself) for Christmas? Here are some ideas to whet your appetite and imagination.

AV GEAR

SQUEEZEBOX BOOM

■ The Squeezebox Boom is an all-in-one network audio player that streams music from your PC or the internet via a 802.11g wireless connection. The player supports pretty much every non-DRM music format, including MP3, FLAC, WMA, WMA Lossless, AAC, Apple Lossless, WAV, and AIFF as well as being able to connect to and manage subscriptions to most Internet radio stations. The UI is straightforward to understand and the included remote control is equally good. Sound quality is very good for the class (far better than pretty much any iPod dock you could name) via the built in speakers, but you can also plug in your own subwoofer for a little extra grunt if necessary. Just the thing for playing your totally legal music collection.

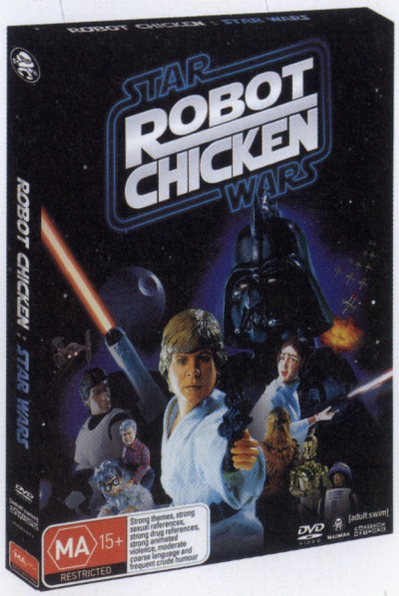
DISTRIBUTOR: LOGITECH
URL: WWW.LOGITECH.COM • **RRP: $499.95**

SCARLET LG61 YD TV

■ The design of the Scarlet line of TVs from LG takes a little getting used to. At first the look of the things can be more than a little overbearing — but after a while the design really begins to appeal. Ultimately, though, design runs a distant second to function, and in that arena, the LG 61 YD is a fantastic 42" TV, boasting a great 100Hz image, dynamic contrast that actually works well (instead of managing to screw up the image no matter the lighting conditions — stupid work TV), 4 HDMI 1.4 ports, bright whites, rich blacks and modes optimised for film, sport and gaming. You really can't complain about the price either — Bing Lee always seem to have at least one Scarlet TV on special and nearly every electronics chain will haggle on the final price.

DISTRIBUTOR: LG
URL: HTTP://AU.LGE.COM • **RRP:** $2399

ROBOT CHICKEN STAR WARS



■ Star Wars hold a special place in the hearts of many people of our generation. The original trilogy was something of a rite of passage when we were growing up and the prequels turned out to be some of the greatest disappointments of our adult lives. Never mind — Robot Chicken Star Wars is arguably better than anything Mr. Beardy has put out Star Wars-related since The Empire Strikes back. The stop motion animation lends itself perfectly to a franchise almost entirely based around selling action figures, it's cheap as chips (check out your nearest JB Hi-Fi) and who could not love the Emperor calling Vader a whiny little bitch and making him cry?

DISTRIBUTOR: MADMAN
URL: WWW.ADULTSWIM.COM.AU • **RRP:** $29.95

MITSUBISHI LASER TV

■ What could be cooler than a massive flat panel TV? How about a massive flat panel TV that uses fricken' laser beams to show the image? The new Laser TV range from Mitsubishi revolutionises rear projection TVs, boasting 200% more colour than other HDTVs, with far brighter colours than anything else on the market (including LCDs and Plasmas), all wrapped in a frame that is under 30mm thick. It's a pretty impressive bit of kit all round. It's even more impressive when you discover that it is 3D ready, making it somewhat future proof for the next few years. Did we mention the sets are huge, with the two current models being 65" and 73"? Of course technology like this doesn't go cheap – the 65" set will be retailing for somewhere in the vicinity of $7000 (USD). If you're the kind of person who can afford one of these for Christmas, we would very much like to be your friend.

DISTRIBUTOR: MITSUBISHI
URL: WWW.MITSUBISHI-TV.COM • **RRP:** $7000 (USD)

TiVO

■ TiVo technology isn't new – it has been around in the US for ages, but it has finally made its way to our shores and it's still a pretty nifty bit of kit. Essentially a set-top box/HDD recorder, a TiVo set allows users to pause live TV, record every episode of specified shows, set recording schedules, search EPGs and the like. If you're a slave to TV timetables it's something of a godsend and, unlike downloading episodes of your favourite TV shows, it's also legal! If you have an HDTV, never fear – the TiVo unit will also function as a decoder, allowing you to watch programming in high definition.

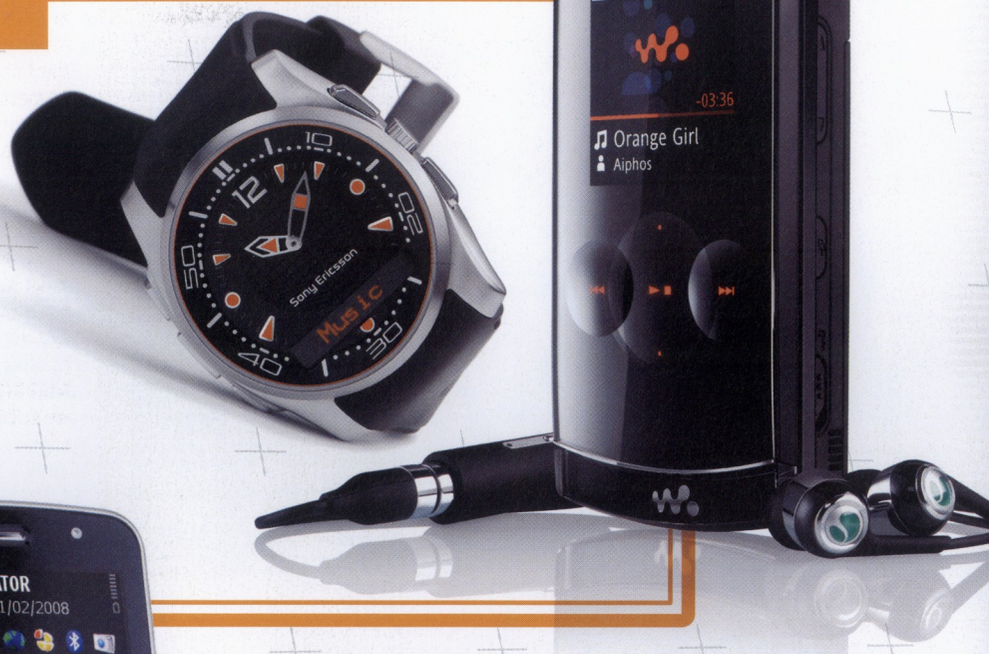
DISTRIBUTOR: TIVO • **URL:** WWW.TIVO.COM.AU • **RRP:** VARIES

BAKUGAN

■ Here's one for the kid brother – it's an action-packed anime series based on a tabletop, Magic the Gathering style card game that also involves spring loaded monster marble things that are used to activate cards and do battle. Or something like that. Confused? We wouldn't blame you if you were. Bakugan is one of those shows that runs by its own internal logic that sometimes defies description – like Dragon Ball Z or Naruto – but it has all of the hallmarks of something that will take the 12 year old world by storm. The series is full of action, monsters and fighting, so the Pokemon crowd should eat it up.

DISTRIBUTOR: MADMAN
URL: WWW.MADMAN.COM.AU • **RRP:** $29.95

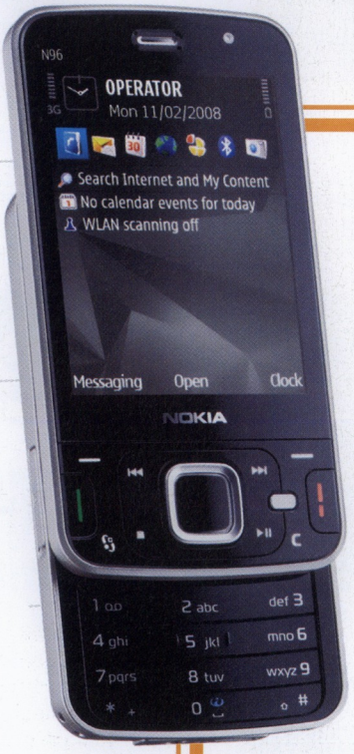
TECH TOYS



NOKIA N96

■ Sure the price tag is steep and there is not a hell of a lot technologically to differentiate the Nokia N96 from the Nokia N95, but that doesn't stop the N96 from being a seriously nice phone/convergence device. In addition to that whole "making calls" thing that mobile phones are apparently good for, the N96 features 16Gb storage for music, games and multimedia files, as well as a Micro-SD expansion slot for extra storage. Bluetooth, GPS, a 5Mp camera with Cark Zeiss optics and a built in mobile TV tuner round out the package. Australian mobile TV is currently pretty woeful, but there's nothing like a bit of future proofing in a mobile device.

DISTRIBUTOR: NOKIA • **URL:** WWW.NSERIES.COM • **RRP:** $999



SONY ERICSSON ULTIMATE BLUETOOTH SET-UP

■ We love gadgets. Presumably you love gadgets too. We also love connectivity. Here's something pretty damn cool, then: a wireless Bluetooth set-up that allows users to control their Sony Ericsson music phone (such as the W980) and Bluetooth headphones via a Bluetooth watch. The watch allows users to monitor music and calls, controlling both via simple controls and an OLED UI. Throw in a couple of Martinis, an improbably named but remarkably attractive woman, a villain with a thing for cats, speeches and hench-women in hotpants and some imminent world threatening danger and you've got yourself a real James Bond gadget.

DISTRIBUTOR: SONY ERICSSON • **URL:** WWW.SONYERICSSON.COM **RRP:** VARIES

CONFEDERATE FIGHTER BIKE

■ Yes, we realise that this vehicle is a little out of most people's price range, that there are only 45 of them and that the bike is being sold exclusively through the uber-exclusive Neiman Marcus store in the USA, but would you just look at it for a second. Is it not spectacular? It looks like something they pulled directly from a cyberpunk novel. And the thing goes 305kmph. So what if it's $110,000 USD? Maybe there really is a Santa. We've been really good all year! We haven't done anything bad at all, and we even chased down a kid who snatched a bag from an old lady! Please Santa; we've been really good. Can we have one?

DISTRIBUTOR: CONFEDERATE • **URL:** WWW.NEIMAN-MARCUS.COM • **RRP:** $110,000

ANDROID PHONE

■ The Apple iPhone gets all of the mainstream press at the moment but on the horison is something far more exciting – the Android phone. Android is an open source mobile phone OS based on a Linux kernel that we should start seeing popping up on phones pretty damn soon. Why are Android phones so exciting? Well, unlike the tight restrictions on iPhone apps enforced by Apple (stupid kill switch), Google are allowing a much freer rein for developers to come up with apps. The other major benefit of Android is the fact that it is a platform rather than a platform/hardware solution, meaning that users will be able to choose the style of Android phone they want, which should mean that plans should be far less restrictive than they are with the iPhone.

DISTRIBUTOR: GOOGLE • **URL:** CODE.GOOGLE.COM/ANDROID
RRP: TBA

ELECTRONIC DRUM KIT SHIRT

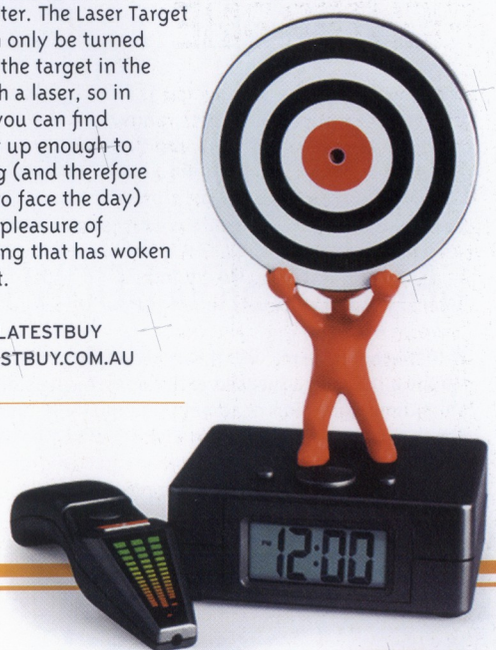
■ Are you the kind of person who beats their chest? If you are, this new shirt from Think Geek can add a little musicality to your chest thumping, with seven tiny playable electronic drums all wired into a small wearable speaker. Each one of the drums on the shirt can be played and each has a different sound. Just imagine: you can give yourself a drum roll before you do something spectacular, or you can finish up a joke by actually playing "badoom-tish", instead of saying it like a chump. This shirt has so many practical uses that we're pretty sure you'll never take it off.

DISTRIBUTOR: THINK GEEK • **URL:** WWW.THINKGEEK.COM • **RRP:** $29.99 (USD)

LASER TARGET ALARM CLOCK

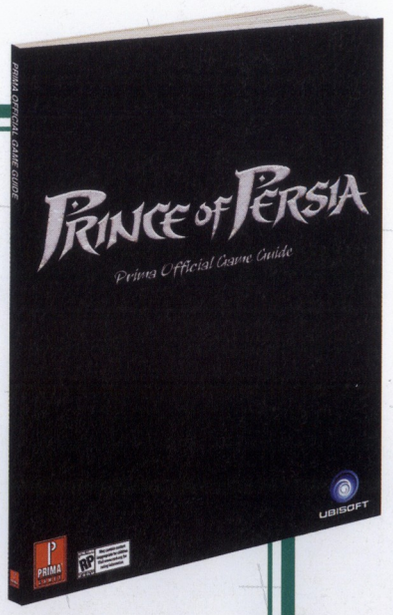
■ Are you a morning person? If you are, then we don't want to have anything to do with you. Morning is a horrible time during which we're pretty sure that the devil crawls through your eyelids and ruins your day. The only thing that can make a morning better is either a little bit of morning nookie or some form of violence. When you can perpetrate said violence upon one of the most evil inventions ever, the alarm clock, so much the better. The Laser Target Alarm Clock can only be turned off by shooting the target in the dead centre with a laser, so in one fell swoop you can find yourself waking up enough to shoot something (and therefore awake enough to face the day) and having the pleasure of shooting the thing that has woken you up. Brilliant.

DISTRIBUTOR: LATESTBUY
URL: WWW.LATESTBUY.COM.AU
RRP: $39.95



GAMING GEAR

PRINCE OF PERSIA STRATEGY GUIDE



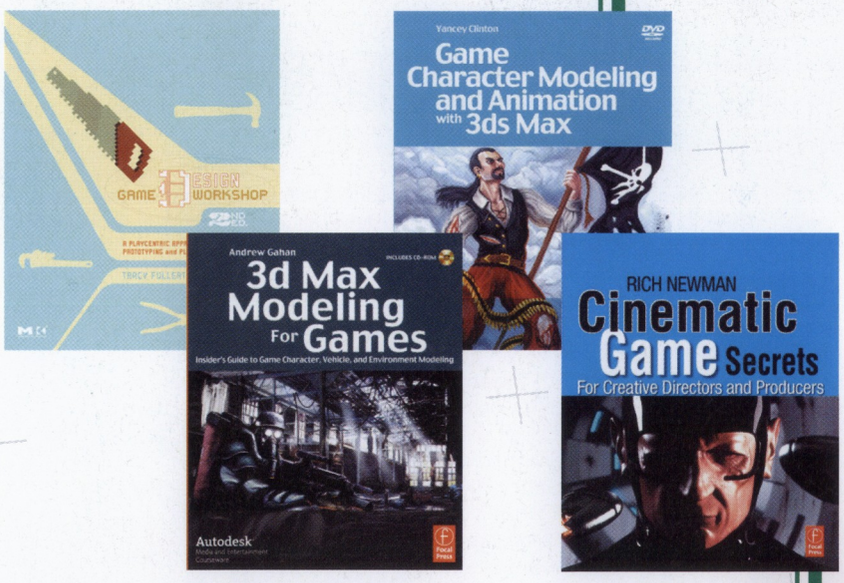
■ The new Prince of Persia is on the way and undoubtedly some people are going to either get stuck, or become obsessed with the idea of finding everything in the game. Instead of waiting for the next Hyper Hints, Cheats and Playguides (that won't be coming until May), you could always pick up a copy of the official Prince of Persia strategy guide. If you are too good or proud to need a strategy guide yourself, think of someone not as great as you — a Christmas gift like this could be just the nudge they need to force them to lift their game.

DISTRIBUTOR: BLUEMOUTH • **URL:** WWW.BLUEMOUTH.COM.AU • **RRP:** TBA

ROCK STIX

■ Although the official documentation of Rock Stix states that they are only compatible with Rock Band, we have a funny feeling that the third party music peripheral will also be compatible with Guitar Hero: World Tour, Rock Band 2 and may even be future-proofed enough to work with next generation (and we mean next generation, not current generation) music games that feature drums. Seriously though, drumming in Rock Band and Guitar Hero: World Tour is awesome, even if you're a hopeless white guy like Wilks, but we reckon it would be even more awesome if you could bang away with some G&R branded drumsticks. Rock pose! Throw up the horns!

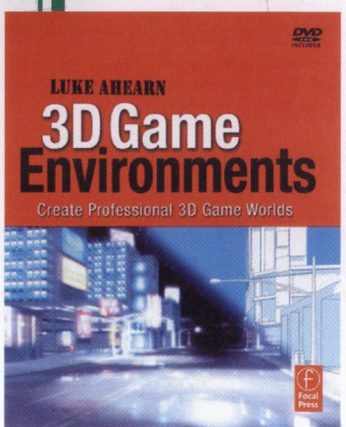
DISTRIBUTOR: BLUEMOUTH
URL: WWW.BLUEMOUTH.COM.AU • **RRP:** $17.95

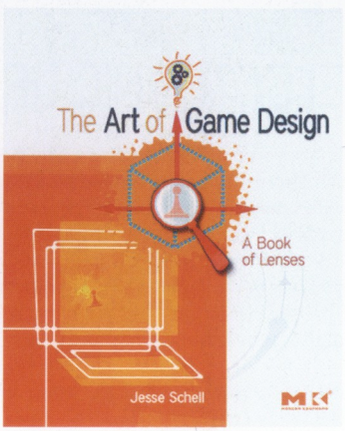


GAME DESIGN BOOKS

■ Interested in game design? Know anyone interested in game design? Maybe a book on advanced techniques, such as digital compositing, animation algorithms or something equally daunting could be the ideal Christmas gift. The books from Elsevier aren't basic how to guides — they're books for people who already have a grounding in the necessary skills, so if you're looking for something more akin to a "Dummies Guide" you should look elsewhere. If you're a serious jobseeker with some real computer skills, these books may be of great use to you.

DISTRIBUTOR: ELSEVIER • **URL:** WWW.ELSEVIERDIRECT.COM • **RRP:** VARIES





PSP 3000

■ The difference between the PSP 3000 and the PSP Slim and Light isn't as drastic as the difference between the PSP Classic and the Slim and Light, but it's still a nice technology update and a must for people who are interested in picture quality. The difference between the new screen and the old screens is obvious even when the handheld is turned off: it's a deeper, richer black. When turned on the difference is remarkable – the screen is far brighter than before, you can easily see the screen in direct light, and the contrast between colours is much more marked. The unit is also much lighter than before. The downside of these modifications is that the new handset feels a little flimsy, and the battery life is around 30 minutes less than previous models due to the extra power drawn by the new screen. Still, if you don't have a PSP, this is definitely the one to buy.

DISTRIBUTOR: SONY • **URL:** WWW.SONY.COM • **RRP:** $299

iPHONE

■ Why do we have the iPhone in Gaming Gear rather than Tech Toys like the other mobile phones? Well, because from what we've seen, the Christmas period and New Year will see the iPhone becoming a legitimate gaming platform, with developers putting together some truly brilliant looking games built especially for the format. While the vast majority of games we're taking about are being developed specially for the iPhone, one port really does make us sit up and pay attention: pretty soon Puzzle Quest will be making its way to the iPhone. When that happens, both Wells and Wilks will be lost in a monster-fighting, Bejewelled haze from which they may never return.

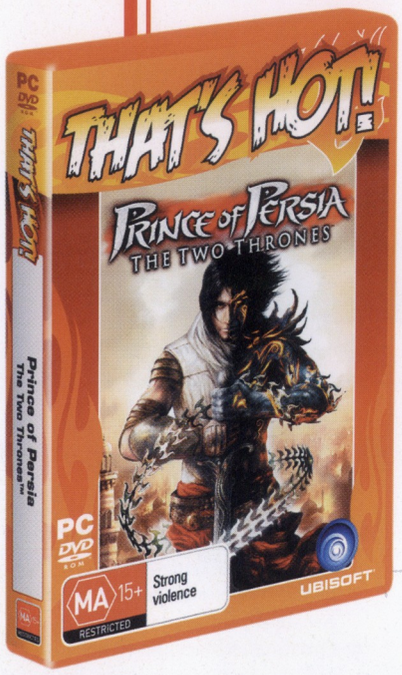
DISTRIBUTOR: APPLE
URL: WWW.APPLE.COM/IPHONE
RRP: VARIES ACCORDING TO PLAN

STEELSERIES WoW MOUSE

■ When do you know you spend too much time playing World of Warcraft? Is it when your wife leaves you? When your personal hygiene finally takes the step over the line from "bad" to "biohazard"? Is it when you start using internet abbreviations in everyday conversations (LOL!)? No. For our money, you know that you, or someone you know has played too much World of Warcraft when they can and will use all 15 programmable buttons on this rather impressive/scary/obsessive gaming mouse. In addition to more programmable buttons that you could ever rationally use, the SteelSeries mouse also allows you to adjust the colour of the illumination – there are only 16 million colours to choose from so it should be a breeze!

DISTRIBUTOR: STEELSERIES • **URL:** WWW.STEELSERIES.COM
RRP: $90 (USD)

GAMES



UBISOFT BUDGET TITLE

■ Budget games make great stocking fillers for friend and loved ones, and the Ubisoft That's Hot range features some pretty damn good games, including Dark Messiah of Might and Magic, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas, Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones, Age of Empires: Collector's Edition, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter, Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, and a whole lot more.

DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT • **URL:** WWW.UBISOFT.COM
RRP: $19.95

GUITAR HERO: WORLD TOUR

■ There are two music games coming out around this Christmas and for our money, Guitar Hero: World Tour is the pick of the bunch, not only due to the fact that it's shaping up to be one hell of a game. Unlike Rock Band, when Guitar Hero: World Tour arrives in Australia it will not be over a year late and released around the same time the rest of the world gets the sequel... not that we're bitter or anything. Anyway, it's shaping up to be a hell of a game, the music creator is going to make for some interesting downloads and the drums are brilliant. If you want a chance to win a copy of Guitar Hero: World Tour on the format of your choice, subscribe in this month's issue of Hyper.

DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION/BLIZZARD
URL: WWW.GUITARHERO.COM • **RRP:** $329

LITTLE BIG PLANET

■ Sackboy has become the face of the PS3 in our minds, and we think that everyone should pick up a copy of the game to support the little stuffed bugger. For the full low-down on the game you can read our review in this issue, but for those of you too lazy to turn back a couple of pages, here's the general gist. A 2D/3D platformer based entirely around physics, whimsy and the community, LBP allows players to create their own levels via an incredibly powerful level editor and then upload them so other players can play and judge their level building skills. Although there are 50 odd levels included in the main game, the real appeal of LBP is the user created levels that will appear online after the game is released. So go out, buy a copy (and a PS3 to play it on if necessary), and create some levels for us to play.

DISTRIBUTOR: SONY • **URL:** WWW.LITTLEBIGPLANET.COM • **RRP:** $99.95

WARHAMMER ONLINE

■ Of course you could turn your back on World of Warcraft, make some kind of snide comment about how Blizzard mercilessly ripped off Games Workshop for history, design and mythology and go out and buy yourself a copy of Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning. IF PvP is your bag then this really is the MMO for you – not only is the PvP fun, it's also meaningful, giving players access to specific PvP based gear and changing the world for other players in the form of realm wide reputation, XP and trade bonuses, as well as unlocking new parts of the faction's capital city, giving players access to new quests and areas.

DISTRIBUTOR: EA • **URL:** WWW.WARHAMMERONLINE.COM • **RRP:** $99.95

STREET FIGHTER IV ARCADE MACHINE

■ OK, so it's technically illegal to buy SF IV arcade boards outside of Japan as yet, but honestly, if you had the money, would you stop yourself from getting your hands on a sweet arcade version of the gorgeous Street Fighter IV? We certainly wouldn't. We'd set up the machine in the office, charge $2 a game and make a fortune. Well, to be honest most of that fortune would have come from the pockets of Hyper staffers, so as a financial investment it wouldn't be that sound, but the simple fact that we owned a SF IV machine would totally outweigh the economic ramifications. Besides, we really don't have the patience to wait until next year for the console version, extra characters or not.

DISTRIBUTOR: CAPCOM
URL: WWW.STREETFIGHTER.COM • **RRP:** $20,000

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

■ Telling people to go out and buy something World of Warcraft related is like telling people to remember to breathe. The game is so ingrained in popular culture now that for a huge chunk of the population buying the upcoming expansion pack will be a reflex action that will require no conscious thought. If you're one of the four or five people left who haven't played World of Warcraft yet, now is the perfect time to start – XP gain has been increased to blast new players through pre-expansion content fast, a new graphics upgrade makes the game look current again, and you can play as a Death Knight. *Death Knight*. We're pretty sure those two words together could be used to sell anything.

DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION/BLIZZARD
URL: WWW.WORLDOFWARCRAFT.COM • **RRP:** $69.95 (AND YOUR LIFE)

WinWinWin

WIN SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING!

25 PRIZES UP FOR GRABS

MAIN PRIZE:
Shaun White Snowboarding Wii + Wii Board

SECONDARY PRIZES:
4x Shaun White Snowboarding Wii
10x Shaun White Snowboarding PS3
10X Shaun White Snowboarding Xbox 360

Strap Wilks into a snowboard and all you'll do is set off a remarkably short chain of events that will result in a fat man tumbling down a mountain. Strap Shaun White into a snowboard, on the other hand, and magic happens. Although playing Shaun White Snowboarding is not going to make you millions of dollars in endorsement deals, licensed games and win you a swag of medals and world titles, it is still a hell of a fun way to pass your time.

Thanks to the good people at Ubisoft we have a hell of a lot of Shaun White Snowboarding gear to throw your way on every console format, from the graphical prowess of Xbox 360 and PS3 through to the Board based motion controls of the Wii version.

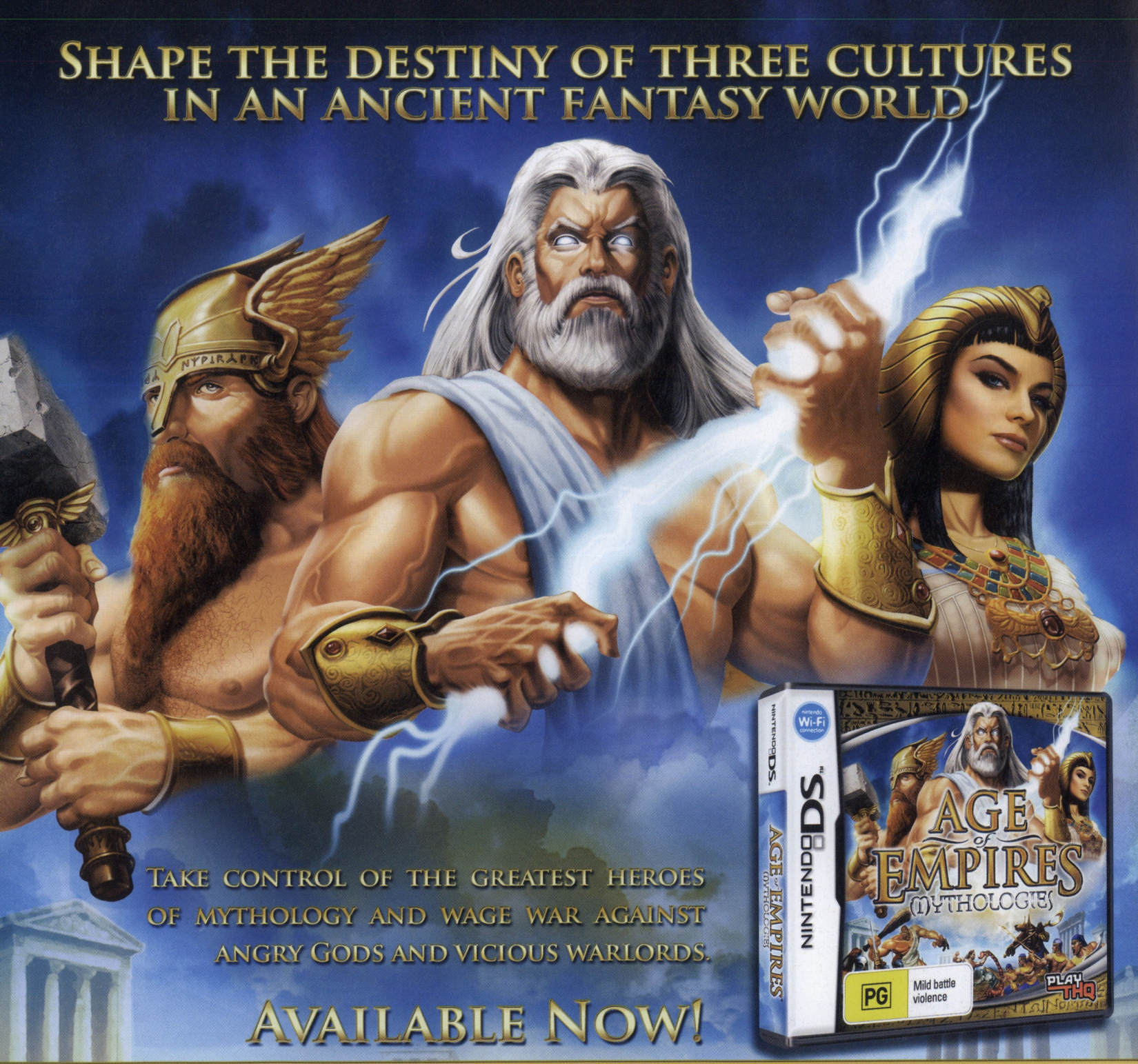
All you need to do for a chance to win is tell us, in 50 words or less, ***What other Xtreme Sport should be made into a game and why?***

All entrants must nominate the format of Shaun White Snowboarding they would like to win.

Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Flying Carrot, Hyper, PO Box 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590** or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please. All entrants must nominate the format of Shaun White Snowboarding they would like to win.

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 November 4, 2008 and entries close at 6pm December 10, 2008. 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 November 13, 2008 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, Level 5, 555 Chandos St, St Leonards 2065. 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) 1 Winner will receive Shaun White Snowboarding on Wii (RRP: $79.95) and a Wii Balance Board (RRP: $149.95). 4 Winners will receive Shaun White Snowboarding on Wii (RRP: $79.95). 10 Winners will receive Shaun White Snowboarding on Xbox 360 (RRP: $109.95). 10 Winners will receive Shaun White Snowboarding on PS3 (RRP: $109.95) Total competition value $2748.70. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of Level 5, 55 Chandos St, St Leonards, 2065.

SHAPE THE DESTINY OF THREE CULTURES IN AN ANCIENT FANTASY WORLD



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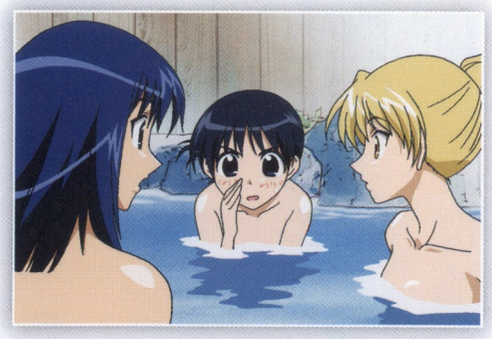
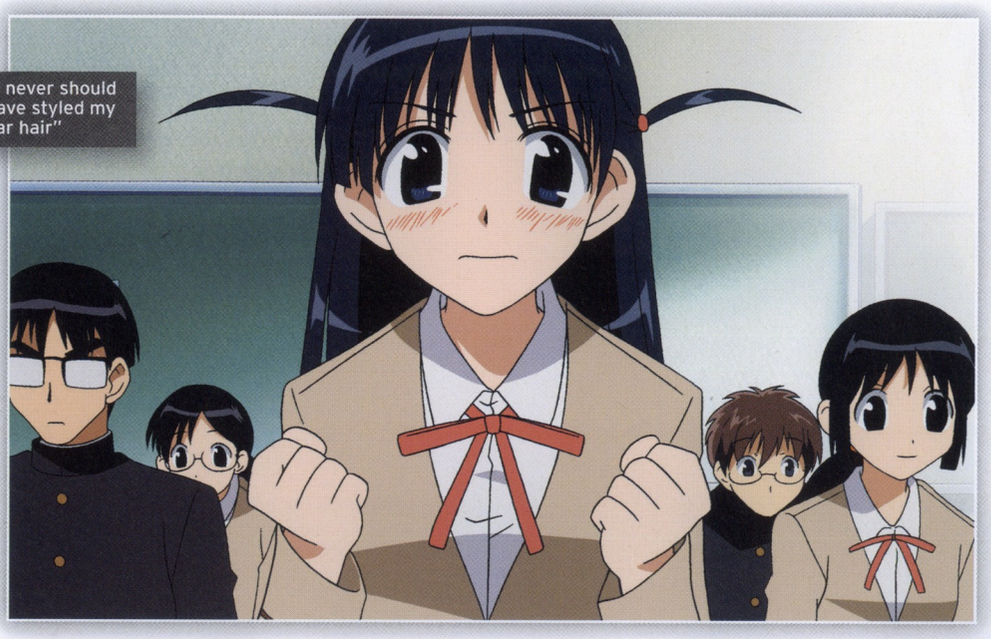
School Rumble – OVA Extra Class

MADMAN, PG

If there's one element that anime features more regularly than randy male school students, I'm yet to see it (tentacle sex? Ed.). School Rumble's characters are composed of the above party, and a requisite gaggle of attractive females, all set against the capers and hijinks of high school. All the pressing issues are tackled, such as partaking in a class lottery to decide which student sits where, lending another classmate some of your pencil lead (not a euphamism), fitting into a clique, and how to best cop a look at naked, bathing girls.

Okay, so far it's getting a pretty flippant treatment, but that's only because School Rumble is similarly whimsical in its storylines. Character reactions, emotions and movements are played up to deliberate effect, portrayed in various degrees of exaggeration. Wild exclamations are made over the slightest of matters, and while the dialogue is not particularly meaningful, it is nonetheless functional. While the overall structure is fairly traditional in terms of its "hot female students whom the male students must perve on and lust after at every waking moment" factor, there's still some fun moments to be had in it, mainly in seeing the over the top ways in which characters respond to a given situation. Oh yeah, and there's plentiful doses of the female form, as the ladies cavort in cleavage-producing tops or bath towels, and naturally it's the duty of the male characters to look at all this bountiful flesh as often as possible.




"I never should have styled my ear hair"

Although OVA Extra Class probably isn't the best entry point for newbies – it's intended as a supplement to the School Rumble series – it's no doubt something for existing followers to consider.

ANIMATION: 6 / STORY: 6 / **OVERALL:6**

The Simpsons Season 11

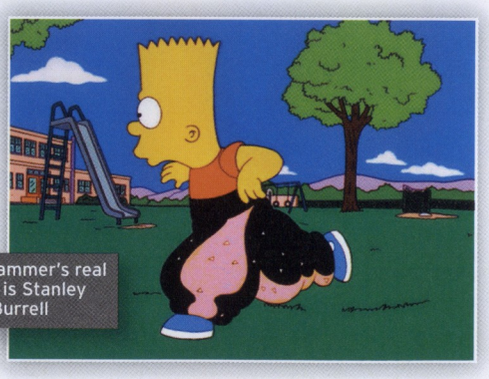
FOX, PG

The exact point at which The Simpsons turns 'bad' is one of the most contested debates amongst enthusiasts of the show. To weigh in with my own (controversial) opinion, I feel the show has never truly gotten entirely bad, with the occasional awful episode being backed up by a solid rate of decency. There's no question that the show's glory days are behind us though, and for my money Season 11 is the last truly excellent season. Classic moments include The Poke of Zorro, tappa-tappa-tappa, Moe as Dr. Tad Winslow, The Hell's Satans, Maude dying and Three Stooges Syndrome. The final episode of the season, 'Behind The Laughter', is probably the last truly fantastic episode to come out of the series.

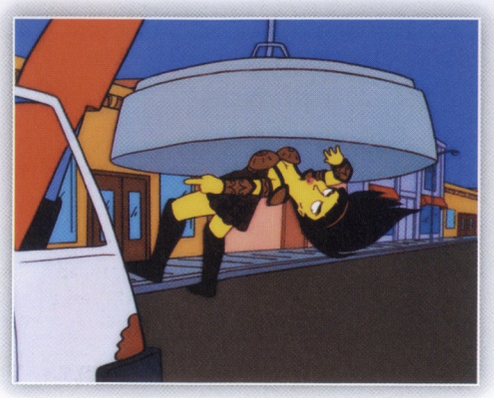
On the other hand, it's also the season where Homer upsets a secret underground society of troll-jockeys. The season where the family goes on the run after Homer accidentally kills Florida's most well-respected alligator. And, of course, the season of Bart To The Future, infamously named 'Worst Episode Ever' by People Magazine. The good far outweighs the bad, but it's still disheartening to see the bad seeping in at all.

The main draw of The Simpsons on DVD has always been the commentaries, and in this regard Season 11 delivers just as much content and quality as always. And it's the commentaries that make you realise that these DVDs will remain relevant long after the actual episodes turn sour, as the team behind the show still knows how to offer up wit, insight and the right mix of self-congratulation and admittance of flaws. Aside from this and the prerequisite deleted scenes, the well is running a bit dry on the special features front, but it's still one of the few shows to offer commentary on every single episode.

James O'Connor


MC Hammer's real name is Stanley Kirk Burrell

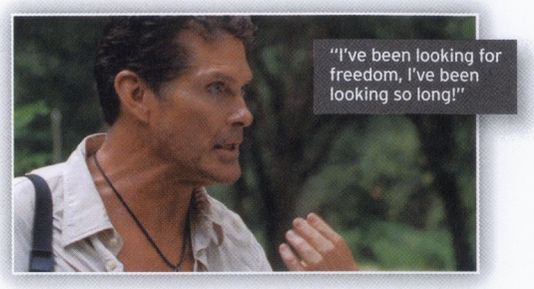
FILM: 6 / EXTRAS: 7

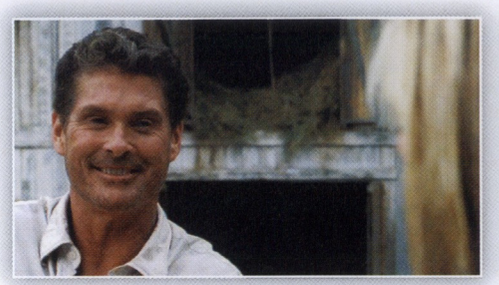


Anaconda 3: Offspring

SONY, MA 15+

Sometimes a movie comes along that is so bad it's good. This is not one of those movies. Anaconda 3: Offspring is a movie so bad it almost makes you lose the will to live. The experience of watching the film is so mind-numbing that reaching over to grab the remote so you can turn it off seems like too much of a chore when it would be so much easier to simply close your eyes and try to fall into a coma. Why is it so bad? Where to start. This made for cable threequel to the already pretty craptacular Anaconda features terrible special effects, ridiculous (and not in a good way) dialogue and what Roger Ebert would refer to as an "idiot plot" – a story that requires both the characters and the audience to be idiots to work. In this case a shadowy corporation has been feeding a couple of giant anacondas with a serum made from Blood Orchids (the focus of the second film for those of you keeping score). The serum has made the anacondas even bigger, hyper intelligent, hyper aggressive and has given them bony blades on their tails for some reason. Why did they do this? To cure cancer or Alzheimer's or something. Apparently the cure for whatever disease they're trying to target necessitates that the female anaconda be pregnant as well. Naturally they escape and cause havoc. Can David Hasselhoff as the most obnoxious, unskilled great white hunter ever and his faithful band of Eastern European nobodies masquerading as bad-arse "trackers" save the day? Who cares.


"I've been looking for freedom, I've been looking so long!"



FILM: 1 / EXTRAS: N/A

Monkey Magic

MADMAN, M

The old television Japanese series Monkey holds a special nostalgic place in the hearts of many people our age. It was one of the seminal shows when we were growing up and, in conjunction with Doctor Who, made for a quality hour of after school entertainment. Not only did Monkey feature violence, comedy and a hyperactive hairy man screaming that everyone was a "pansy poofter faggot!", it also marked the first instance of sexual confusion for many, thanks to the fact that the show cast an attractive woman as a young man.

Understandably we were excited at the prospect of a modern movie adaptation of Monkey Magic – on paper the film contains just about everything we could want from a Monkey film; a woman playing Sanzo Hoshi (Tripitaka), Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy, Gold and Silver Horn as the demon enemies and a special effects budget probably bigger than the entire budget of both seasons of the original show. On paper it looks great, but the actual experience of watching Monkey Magic is quite patchy. None of the characters are particularly likeable at all. All Goku (Monkey) does is whine, yell and run away like a covard, Sanzo Hoshi cried and runs away from things and Pigsy and Sandy are so characterless they may as well not even be in the film. The action choreography is analogous to that of the original series, but with the greatly improved production qualities comes across as dull and amateurish rather than fun and nostalgic.

The very image of sexual confusion

FILM: 6 / EXTRAS: 3

MAIL HYPER!

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∏ OUT OF ∞

Hey there Hyper.

In your latest issue, you broke 15 years of tradition and changed the scores from a percentage to a simple x/10 system. Hooray! Or not. I understand fully that the new system is simpler, less confusing, so on and so forth. I understand that you feel the old system implied that the score was something "scientific" and precise.

I'm here to tell you that this was not the case. Before I launch into a big tirade about my reasons for disliking the new system, I'll give you an example, taken from the pages of the latest Hyper issue.

The Witcher - Enhanced Edition scored 10/10. Fair enough, it's obviously the best game that was reviewed this month. It is obviously the game this month that Hyper feels they should endorse with a rubber stamp. Oh wait! The Hyper Game of the Month was de Blob. With an 8. On face value, the overall quality and enjoyment of de Blob is 20% less than that of The Witcher. This does not make sense to me. After reading both reviews, I can safely say that de Blob probably would have gotten a rating of 85+ based on it's originality and enjoyment factors. It would have been kept from the 90s because of it's simplicity and lack of true depth. The Witcher would have scored something in the mid-high 90s based on it's fantastic graphics, new sounds and animations, and the new gameplay editor. It would have been kept from scoring the full 100 because it is still a rehash of an existing game, a lot of the improvements merely addressed problems with the original, and it is not as groundbreaking or original as games with 97s, 98s and 99s such as Super Mario 64, Grand Theft Auto 3 etc. So let's say it would be a 95.

That, is only 10% difference. That is a far more acceptable difference between two games that Hyper believes should have our attention. There are not only 10 tiers of game quality. I know that there aren't 100 either, but at least a percentage system gave us a little more of an accurate insight into how the reviewer approached the game. We knew at a glance that the reviewer had to think about where that game sat in the current batch of releases. Now, I am honestly not going to even give a shit about what the score is, because frankly a 9 is a 9 and a 10 is a 10 and it tells me jack all about what level of quality the game provides.

Hyper has always been my favourite mag. I love the writing, and I love the layout. And until now, I appreciated the fact that review scores made me think about how the reviewer came to that conclusion. It made me grateful that the reviewer wasn't just giving us a generalised score, but they had to think about where those few extra points were coming from. Thanks to the change, though, review scores will mean nothing, and the depth that your reviews used to have will have been polished into something so simple we glean nothing from it.

This sounds a bit harsh, I know, but I was going to renew subscription next month. Instead, I will just be checking the mag month-by-month (like I do with White Dwarf, PC Powerplay) to see whether it's worth a purchase.

I really hope this change doesn't affect the quality of the rest of the magazine.

But I still totally love you guys! Even if you did give Witcher a perfect score!

Nerje

We appreciate your feedback mate but we think your logic is a little flawed. We'll start with the Game of the Month thing. Game of the Month doesn't necessarily mean the best game of the month. We're using it to mean our favourite game of the month: the one we spent the most time playing and that we could all agree on as being a great game. For issue 181 that game was de Blob. I think the problem is that you seem to be placing percentage values on something that does not need percentage values attached. Scoring de Blob 8/10 and The Witcher 10/10 does not mean that one is 20% better than the other or that The Witcher is perfect. One of the reasons we moved across to scoring out of 10 was the fact that before we were limited in the way we could score a game. If a game came along that we thought was bloody brilliant and we were limited to scoring it 97 – to score any higher would instantly imply that said game was the best game ever and that it was nigh-on perfect.

Scoring out of 10 does away with this problem. 10 doesn't mean a game is perfect. It means it's a 10 out of 10. Take The Witcher, for example. How would you score the re-release of an already brilliant game in a much-improved form, with extra content and supplemental material at a price point cheaper than the original release?

While you may disagree, we believe that a single score out of 10 is far easier to read and interpret than four independent scores out of 100.

> **"I really hope this change doesn't affect the quality of the rest of the magazine"**

Feedback

the_watchers_eye: **Very disappointed to see the scoring system has changed. It was really something that set Hyper apart, and allowed reviewers to express themselves in a concise form. I won't rant and rave, since a) I already did when the issue was under discussion previously and b) I'm sure this thread will degrade into arguing even without my contribution. I will say, however, that I am curious as to how much of an impact Hyper's new overlords had in this decision - especially since I recall Wilks putting the issue to bed a few issues ago with something along the lines of 'we asked for your feedback and decided not to change the scoring system'. I suspect it was more than what is being let on.**

Allick: **I liked the old scoring system better, but I think that in a way it kinda dug you guys (the editors and writers etc.) in a rut because if you ever gave a game 98/100 or more some serious fanboys of the previous top scoring games would come to your offices kill y'all. By that of course i mean they'll write angry letters regarding the totally awesome features and character devellopment that there favourite 97 game has, and this new confangled 98 game doesn't. So basically I liked the old scoring system better, but I think the new one will work better.**

Ad-Rock: **I'm torn on the new scoring system. It's more simple but is it really as informative?**

I guess, as reviews will always contain some level of subjectivity, that the more general nature of this system allows for that leeway.

My main problem with it is that change is scary and I loved the old system cause I thought I knew where each game ranked in the overall scheme of things. But, now, the more I think about it, I think a 1-10 system is a better, less subjective, guide to good, mediocre and crap games.

GREAT MAG, ARTICLES, CAPTIONS

To start off, this may be my first letter to you guys, but I've been reading your magazine for a very long time now, and I have to say that Hyper is still the most informative and entertaining magazine you can find in a newsagent, even after 15 years. I collect many differnet magazines concerned with gaming, and although they help provide me with insight as to which games would be best suited to my tastes, I find myself always using your reviews as a first and last opinion.

Your articles are well written, with each contributor inputting their own brand of humour and flair in each preview/review/article, etc, opinions are unbiased, helping the readers judge the true merits (or demerits, as it may be) of a game, and you provide enough variety so that there's a little something for everyone.

Something which I feel a lot of people take for granted are the captions. Although I won't name names, there was a certain Playstaion mag that for a long period used penis joke captions excessively to the point where I actually avoided looking at the snapshots for reviews. Hyper's caption jokes can sometimes be groan-tastic, but nethertheless they still provide extra entertaiment outside of the actual review.

There aren't that many Austalian video game mags out there, but Hyper has defintely established itself over it's rivals as the best vallue for money. Thank you Hyper, for all the years you've been with me and guided my gaming decisions since I was young, and thank you Hyper Crew, for all the effort you have put into the mag for all those out there

with a passion for gaming (or even a passing interest). May we be blessed with many more years of you to come.

Till next time

Aaron B

PS. I know you guys get enough praise as it is, so I'll make my next letter more about what's on my mind.

We're never adverse to basking in glowing praise, and we thank you for allowing us to do that!

THE ART OF GAMING

Games are art right? Except when they're not. Except they are, because they're games, and games are art right? Confused? I am, and here's why. Any gamer with a soul will agree that masterpieces like Bioshock, Portal, GTA4 and anything with the words metal, gear and solid in the title are works of art. I would say that even tetris qualifies (cubism?). These games and many, many more are brilliant, engaging, and often moving, as evidenced by the countless individuals who derive such pleasure from experiencing them and discussing their experiences with other like minded people. But what of the bad games? The horrible, eye bleedingly atrocious buckets of pure drek that are regularly the ire of those who handed over fistfuls of hard earned cash in the hopes that maybe, just maybe, the hype has been justified. Are these rotten discs from Satans' own assembly line something we, the gaming community, can hold up and say " Behold! I have an Art!"? That depends I suppose. If art is something that moves one, then yes, for even the worst game can move us, though it may only be to tears. Disappointment, frustration, rage, these are emotions and if something like 25 to Life can rouse these feelings in a gamer then perhaps it is a work of art, albeit a wholly misguided one. Not every novel is a classic, not every film is timeless and there are scores of paintings that are, well, not great. Yet literature, cinema and art of the canvas are all grouped as single entities and all are able to squeeze in together under the vast umbrella known as art. Is there no room for games? Do they not meet the criteria of all the other arts? The process of creating much which is bad or mediocre, and depressingly little which is superb.

Perhaps it's the whole interactivity thing. Roger Ebert says, and i quote, "Video games by their nature require player choices, which is the opposite of the strategy of serious film and literature, which requires authorial control. I am prepared to believe that video games can be elegant, subtle, sophisticated, challenging and visually wonderful. But i believe the nature of the medium prevents it from moving beyond craftsmanship to the stature of art" . Okay. Thanks Roger. What about the old 'Choose your own adventure' books then? I know that's a pathetically weak, straw grasping argument but hey, books are art right? Seriously though, the goals and structure of the vast majority of games are pretty much set in stone. Incidental details may vary and subplots may pan out differently for individual players, but for the most part it's all a matter of ' kill him, save her, find the magic goblin key to progress'. Yeah I know, different endings challenge this perception, though usually not enough. When they do though, it is generally awesome. What I'm saying is, choices are dependent on the person making them. The act of choosing probably reveals more about yourself than simply doing what you're told. But blindly doing what you're told is kinda telling too. Games have a veritable monopoly on choice and that's a key selling point these days what with all the open worldiness and such. Choose your own art-venture? I like it.

I don't want to sound like a complete idiot but I honestly couldn't tell you what makes something art and not just some.... thing. I'm not an artist, I'm not a game designer, I'm not a critic, I'm not even Roger Ebert. I am a gamer though and as a gamer I have to put up with all the crap that goes along with it, including but not limited to the whole 'They're just games, they're not art you loser'. I never said they were, I'm just asking why they aren't. And so far no-one's given me a really satisfactory answer. Every argument negates another until everyone's just sitting around looking disgruntled and nobody wants to play with me. When did having fun get so complicated? Why do I have to pick a side? Why am I a shiftless layabout for playing games all day or a noob for not committing to the games ARE art crusade? Can't we all just get along?

I've asked a lot of questions and offered little in the way of concrete or well informed answers. In the end though, if a game is art to me, or art to you, if it makes us feel something or question why we do what we do, isn't that enough?

andyman

To some people, no. Some, like Ebert, take the definition of art and relate it directly to authorial intent: that is, looking for a single message that the artist wishes to convey. If an audience receives the same message, then it's art. If different people take away different messages or interpret the piece in wildly different ways, then it's not art. That's a crude summation, but it seems to be the main sticking point whenever this topic is discussed, and too often gaming's interactive nature is its downfall. While games with multiple endings may have a harder time entering into the debate – they're really not conveying a single message from the author, but telling the story you want to experience – linear games that have a clear and precise narrative, complete with key situations and moments, can potentially bring something to the table. Just as film stood as the outsider before being accepted alongside literature, so too do videogames. Perhaps it's only a matter of time. Then again, perhaps games in their current form will never be art. Will future developments in technology help gaming's cause?

Forum Talk

TOPIC: What can't you eat?

Sweating Bullets: **I cannot eat onions.**

Raw or cooked - I just can't eat them.

Not due to allergy tho, just the taste of them makes me want to hurl.

So what do the Hyper crew refuse to eat?

FrozenSoul8o: **I can't eat raw tomatoes, they give me mouth ulcers. Not that it really matters, tomatoes are better cooked.**

Araenel: **Nothing I can't eat techincally, but I'm not a fan of avocado, and I despise olives.**

Newell: **I cannot eat:**

- **Gluten**
- **Stringy or acidic foods (e.g. celery, pineapple respectively)**
- **Bicycles**

Second: **In my life, I've met two people that admitted that they hate bananas. Is it wrong for me to label them as freaks?**

/backslash: **Anchovies, avocado, gravy, oysters, lobsters, crabs, olives, mushrooms, cabbage, ducks, road runners, space weevils - all by choice. I don't think I'm allergic to anything except maybe sulphuric acid**

Aerodynamic: **I don't really like peanut butter or jam alone on bread but man when those two come together I will go to town on them.**

I also hate cucumber, always take it out of salads.

Hyperblau: **Seafood i cant handle, its not really the taste though, its the texture. I can get past that with most seafood if its deep fried though. Also, sundried tomatoes (unless cooked), once again its the texture, makes me gag.**

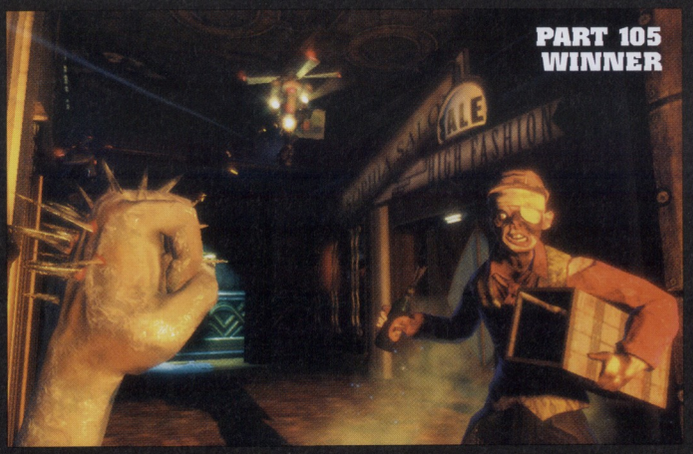
batman_sandwich: **My dad.**

Readman: **Oh, on-topic - I actually got the chance to eat dog meat the other week. Incredibly tender but overall not that tasty I think. Apparently there's a specific type of dog that the Koreans breed for it, that's similar to a greyhound.**

One day I plan to go to Japan and try whale.

CAPTION THIS!

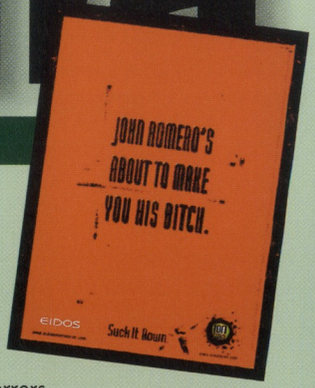
Nathan Weaver rises above the pack to bring us this caption-riffic gem...



Too late: the drunk Splicers realised they had been playing catch with a puffer-fish.

Daikatana

PC/N64 • 2000 • Publisher: Eidos Interactive • Developer: Ion Storm » James O'connor



'John Romero's about to make you his bitch'. Daikatana's infamously premature magazine ad proved, in the end, to be unusually insightful. Certainly, having played Daikatana, the game that Romero (creator of Doom) staked so much of his time and reputation on, I feel as though I have been made someone's bitch. What can I say? I didn't think it could be as bad as people said it was. I thought the bad press was purely the result of overhyping. But Daikatana isn't your typical average game let down by an overactive marketing campaign- it's almost completely devoid of redemption. And yet the attention Daikatana drew to itself is a more relevant issue than ever, as more and more games that have the absolute hell hyped out of them- Alone in the Dark, Haze, Too Human, ect cetera- turn out to be average at best, and at worst, bollocks. In development for four years, Daikatana, admittedly, isn't quite at the bottom of the barrel- but it serves as such an important tenant of a lesson on how to absolutely, completely fail in the videogame industry that it deserves to be looked at.

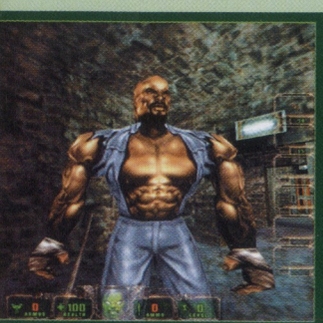
DIE, KATANA!

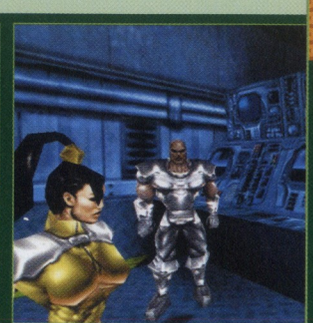
Daikatana, a standard PC FPS with RPG aspirations, tells the story of a long-haired douchebag living in futuristic Japan, who is ordered by a man with a head like a boiled onion to hunt down a mysterious sword. This involves travelling through time, shooting lots of robots and remembering how great Doom was. All logic is thrown out in the first minute of the game. After a heavy-handed opening cutscene that ends with two poorly-accented Japanese men accidently throwing a coffin containing your live body into a swamp (seriously), you find yourself battling spycam-flies, robotic toads and gun turrets with your new Ion Blaster. Which you found in a swamp. The same swamp that has robots and gun turrets everywhere. Oh dear. A short way into the game, you meet up with two companions, Mikiko and Superfly Johnson, who accompany you for the rest of the game. Hopefully, as the years go by, Daikatana will remain the last place the word 'superfly' is ever used. The pair are utterly devoid of artificial intelligence, ruining everyone's good time by constantly getting themselves killed. Every single weapon in the game is awful. For some reason, the powers that be at Ion Storm decided it would make sense if every single weapon in the game either didn't work properly or damaged you when you used it. Even firing a shotgun uses up six shots at once, for no ascertainable reason. Firing a pistol underwater electrocutes you. Whose idea of fun is this? There are a few vague RPG elements to Daikatana too, except leveling up your abilities really didn't have much effect. Sure, maxing out in some areas means you can access hidden stuff from earlier levels, but really if you want to go back to something you've played earlier, just play through Doom again instead. There's a Nintendo 64 version too, which is reportedly much worse, but not hyped to buggery quite so much as the PC version. Both versions featured deathmatch multiplayer, while the PC version features a co-op campaign, but neither are really worth mentioning as nobody bothered to play them.

Hopefully, as the years go by, Daikatana will remain the last place the word 'superfly' is ever used

ROMERO AND DISQUIET

The story behind Daikatana plays out like an epic nerd soap opera. A cursory investigation turns up stories of uncooperative teams, inexperienced designers, heady ambitions and a boatload of drama for everyone over at Ion Storm. One thing is very clear, though- there were some real nerds on the team. In fact, the game is so nerdy that gamers should probably stop every few hours and make sure that their computer hasn't suffered liquid ingress damage from all the nerd sweat dripping through the disc. This is the sort of game a 14 year old would devise after watching Akira and Ninja Scroll for the first time. The name translates roughly to 'Big Katana', and is based on a weapon used by one of Romero's friends during a game of Dungeons & Dragons. The Japanese characters have accents like American men trying to impersonate Taiwanese hookers. Before too long you're jumping around in Ancient Greece, shattering skeletons with the titular sword, which doesn't look the least bit Japanese, wishing you could pull an Oedipus and rip out your own eyes to erase the horrors you've witnessed. Sometimes when you die, a message pops up informing you that 'Hiro Miyamoto fails at life'. Someone must have stolen a lot of Romero's lunch money as a child. But the saddest thing about Daikatana is that Romero is still proud of the end product. He writes on his website- 'Daikatana required you to also help your sidekicks survive the ordeal alongside you. This new play mechanic threw many people off the game because it was too difficult. But playing Daikatana again today, this is one fast and furious FPS...still.' (http://rome.ro/games_daikatana.htm). This was written well after the fact, at the point where most developers would concede that, yes, they messed up pretty bad. And to think, this is the same man who gave us Doom, not to mention the development studio that later gave us Deus Ex. While there a handful good points to the game- thanks to the time travel plot, locations vary pretty significantly, and in most circumstances the game controls fairly well- it's ultimately not the kind of thing you'd even bother putting on a resume. In the end, Daikatana sold pretty poorly, despite all the time and money spent on advertising the thing over the years. Not quite the vicious, all-out assault on the face with a knife that most of the games I've covered so far have been akin to, Daikatana is closer to waking up on Christmas morning expecting a new bicycle and instead getting punched in the stomach by a drunken, abusive step dad with long, greasy hair and a suspicious age gap between himself and your mother. The game is available for free, legal download from Gametap. I wouldn't reccommend it any more than I would recommend dating Roseanne Barr. «





HANDHELD BLADE

In a surprise twist, while the PC and N64 versions reviewed horribly, the Game Boy Color version of Daikatana, developed by Kemco, was pretty well received. Never released in the US, Daikatana GBC was a Zelda-styled adventure, with a script written entirely by Romero himself. The puzzles were clever, the game design was intelligent and, although it couldn't match up to the games that inspired it, it was solid. Not worth going out of your way to get hold of a copy, but worth pondering over for a moment.

73
93
40
1

LAND OF THE RISING FUN

JONTI DAVIES ON GAMES AND LIFE IN JAPAN.

Recent Nintendo and Microsoft console launches have generally fallen in the favour of American gamers – the Wii was released in America a whole two weeks before it debuted in Japan, as was the original DS hardware, while the Xbox 360 landed in Japan three weeks after showing up in the States – but it wasn't always like this (I believe Australia had to wait a year for the N64). So allow me to feel a bit smug in the news that Nintendo's intriguing DSi will launch in Japan several months ahead of its appearance in other parts of the world. It's just like the old days, really...

I've already gone to my local games store and told them I want a DSi, no matter what, and that I'd like to be informed as soon as pre-orders begin. That's the surest way of getting a foot in the shop door, and such determination will probably be necessary as only a few hundred thousand units will be available on November 1st – and you can bet your old-fashioned DS Lite that every Suzuki and Tanaka is going to want one of these shiny new machines.

The question is: why will everyone in Japan want a DSi? And why do I want one? I think Nintendo has been clever by introducing a few new features with the DSi, rather than just one main difference or even a simple redesign, the reason being that potential buyers can find various factors to substantiate their decision to give yet more money to Nintendo. For me, it's the prospect of downloadable games via the DSWare Shop and, after reading Satoru Iwata's quotes in the Asahi Shinbun last weekend, the prospect of new camera-driven games. Specifically, he outlined Nintendo's plan to bring camera games to DSi in the very near future, saying: "We want to release games that use the cameras as soon as possible – we want to propose a new kind of entertainment."

Of course last year there was a camera peripheral for the DS Lite released alongside a piece of 'do your own make-up' training software. It did reasonably well in Japan but the camera was never put to any other use, and now we know why: Nintendo was saving the idea for its next iteration of the DS hardware. So, what can we expect in the way of camera games? More than just a sequel to that game-for-beauticians-and-teenaged-girls, I'd hope. Perhaps we'll get DSi games where, instead of Miis as avatars, we'll be able to project our own faces into games and thereby 'appear' in them (there are two cameras on the DSi, one of which is facing up at the user from inside the shell design)? I would hope and expect, however, that Nintendo has much better ideas on the drawing board.

Will the Japanese DSi launch be a repeat of the queue-fest that was Japan's Wii debut?

MAIN IMAGE: YOSHIKAZU TSUNO

BAD COP, NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

You're dead to me

Gaming, as a medium, is something that surges forward with an almost unstoppable momentum. Just when you think you've seen the best looking game in the world, along comes another that makes you feel like a dolt for ever thinking that it looked great. Every single iteration of Tomb Raider is an example of this. When the first game was released 200 years ago, or whenever it was, people marvelled at how good it looked, how smooth the animations were and even, shockingly, how competent the camera was. Look at it today and it's some nightmare about a woman creature with boobs made of razor sharp prisms. This unchecked advancement is a good thing as far as I'm concerned.

Something that is not good is the way that some developers cling to outmoded gameplay conventions that have rarely been necessary since games made the jump from arcades into the home, years after they should have been layed to rest once and for all.

Save Points

There is only one reason that can possibly justify the inclusion of save points in a game, and that is that the hardware is incapable of saving at any time during a game due to limitations in the storage medium. Back in the dim dark past it was only possible to save at save points and checkpoints, as trying to save a character at a random point in a game would simply take up too much memory. Instead of simply saving the save point at which the character would begin when they next played (this could be saved as a simple numeric point), the game would have to save the status of the character and the exact point on the map at which they saved. That's a whole hell of a lot more information. When hardware couldn't handle the strain, save points were understandable.

That's not the case now. All hardware has the capacity to save anywhere but some developers still insist on using save points. The culprits are mostly survival horror developers. I've heard the excuse about the lack of places to save heightening the sense of tension, but to me that smacks of bullshit. If you have to rely on gamers being tense about maybe dying and having to go back and play through a whole section of the game again to have any form of atmosphere, then you must not be doing a very good job at evoking the feeling of horror. It will be interesting to see if save points will die out now that both the Resident Evil and Silent Hill series have done away with them. We can only hope.

Lives

Having a limited number of lives is a concept as dead as disco in most genres. Sure, they work, and are an essential component in Shmups, but there are very few other genres in which they belong, especially in console and PC games. The whole point of buying a game is, one would think, for the gamer to immerse themselves in the game and get maximum enjoyment out of it. Limiting the way in which a player can do this by limiting the number of times they can screw up before having to restart is simply a recipe for dissatisfaction.

I'm not claiming that there should be no death or anything of the sort (though inevitably someone will write in to tell me I'm soft and the only reason I don't like lives is because I suck and die all the time) - what I am proposing is that developers find some other way to create a sense of damger without having to fall back on outmoded arcade concepts.

Game Over

All a Game Over screen really is is a rather frustrating/insulting load screen between tries. Unless a game really sucks, most people who fail a mission/objective/fight/race will jump back on the horse and restart said mission, so what is the point of slowing down the proceedings with a screen informing you that the game is over?

inevitably someone will write in to tell me I'm soft and the only reason I don't like lives is because I suck

In the last few months I've played numerous games with a Game Over screen, all of which felt out of place, but none moreso than one Japanese RPG and one strategy/RPG. In the RPG, if the main character died you got a Game Over screen that slowly faded to the game start screen, from which you had to navigate through the menu to Load Game then choose the save you wanted to load. It was almost as though the developers didn't even want you to try again and were simply resigned to the fact that you were going to give up at that point. I honestly can't see the point of forcing the player through a minute or so of staring at a screen and navigating menus so they could try to tackle the section of the game again (the fact that the game used save points added to the frustration).

The strategy game was a similar story. One would expect that a developer would simply allow a player to retry a failed mission instead of telling them that they'd failed then bumping them out to the title screen, but no. Maybe there is some logic at work here, but for the life of me I can't see it.

Game Over screens are an arcade throwback. By their very nature arcade games have to limit the amount of time someone can play the game before having to pay again, but when you own the game you really don't beed someone telling you that you screwed up and the fun times are over.

THE PASSION OF THE GAMER

DYLAN BURNS

What a Feeling

There comes a general malaise when one partakes in the critique of gaming for any prolonged period. This unfocused feeling of unease comes from a combination of elements. I believe I have isolated one such element after several sessions of deep meditation and passionate confabulation with similarly-minded members of the gaming media.

For the unwashed masses, this particular psychological phenomenon can most aptly be demonstrated via analogy. But first, let me explain my personal manifestation of what I'm babbling on about.

We've all read the horror stories, fables written by games journalists about how awful the job can be and for you, the reading public, to never consider becoming a games critic if you want to keep your sanity. Yes, every job has its shitty elements, and loss of sanity is certainly a very real hazard in this industry, but one excellent benefit of being a games writer is that you will often have access to lots of games... or more precisely, lots of free games.

At first this perk does nothing but give you an awesome feeling of superiority as you play the day (or night) away with titles that you know other people have had to buy.

Granted, we often have to actually apply written critique to these titles, so in some sense playing games is still work. But still, free games would have to be the best kind of job bonus you can get, for a sad gaming geek at least.

Now, you probably won't believe me – after all, I'm just some stuffy old Boffin sitting in a mansion, dreaming of simpler, halcyon days when kids respected their elders and Nintendo didn't try to sell consoles to old ladies – but after a certain period of time, and it's different for everyone, the excitement felt at getting free games wears off and something rather frightening occurs. You stop valuing games.

Do we force ourselves into liking completely average games because we paid for them?

I can't speak for everyone in the gaming press, but I certainly feel less inclined to enjoy all that a game offers if I haven't had to spend my own money on it. So I'll usually pop it in, blast through the main campaign, tick all the exploratory boxes if I need to review it, and then put it on the 'done' pile, never to be played again. It holds no value to me unless it's a kick-arse title, in which case I will usually purchase the game myself, for all the extra CE goodies and what not.

It's during the purchasing ritual that a game is imbued with emotional value. I simply must play it, perhaps even force myself to enjoy it, because the money I spent represents several hours of my life converted into wages.

As I said at the beginning, the closest analogy I can offer to those of you who do not get free games (did I mention I get free games?) is the act of renting. When you only have to plonk down a fiver for a new release game rental (if you pay more, then my village rocks!), the amount of effort you invest in it will likely reflect your reduced financial investment.

If other intrusions on your time happen to take place, that rental might get pushed aside, and you may only play it for an hour or two. That's okay, because you'll probably pass most of the missions, muck around with the multiplayer and then return the game with no intention of ever revisiting it again – much like my experience with freebies.

Compare this to the excitement that many of us feel when purchasing a new game. We peruse online sites, checking previews and reviews. We trawl through Hyper, or various other print media, to see what scores the game got or what our favourite writers have to say about it. Then, our minds made up, we descend upon the shopping district with a single goal burning brightly in our synapses: buy that game! The excitement is palpable, and your bank card practically trembles in your hand as you offer it to the sales person, watching with strange glee as those virtual dollars disappear from your bank account like leaking oil from a shot barrel.

Are you simply going to play this game for a few hours and forget it? No effin' way man; that baby won't leave your disc drive for a whole week! Every waking moment is spent playing the thing, exploring all of its play modes, unlocking achievements or trophies and bragging to your online mates of your in-game exploits.

I would argue that we in fact force ourselves to value purchased games more, to the point where we may even gloss over many of their inherent flaws. A purchased game is like a child of your loins, something that may annoy you no end but which at times manages to still your beating heart when it does something so very right.

Borrowed, hired or free games, on the other hand, are like kids you've been lumped with because one of your annoying aunties needs to go away for a few days. If they stink, you can just shut them in a room, forget about them and then give them back to their rightful owner, feigning innocence at those coffee stains your dog must have made.

Do we in fact force (or trick) ourselves into liking completely average games because we paid for them? I will be the first to admit that I have done so in the past, and will likely do so again.

I guess the interesting line of thought here is whether these invested feelings of game worth are just as valid as the opinion of a writer who may not give every single game its due value, particularly when it comes to a review. But then surely readers can't expect every reviewer to buy their own games. We'd go broke!

What do you think? Are reviewers out of touch with the experience of the general buying public? Or does this removal of an emotional attachment to purchased games in fact empower games writers to be much more objective than anyone else? I'm certainly interested to hear what you have to say.

gameboffin@hotmail.com

The line for returns starts here

GAMES WANK: AN EXERCISE IN OVER-ANALYSIS

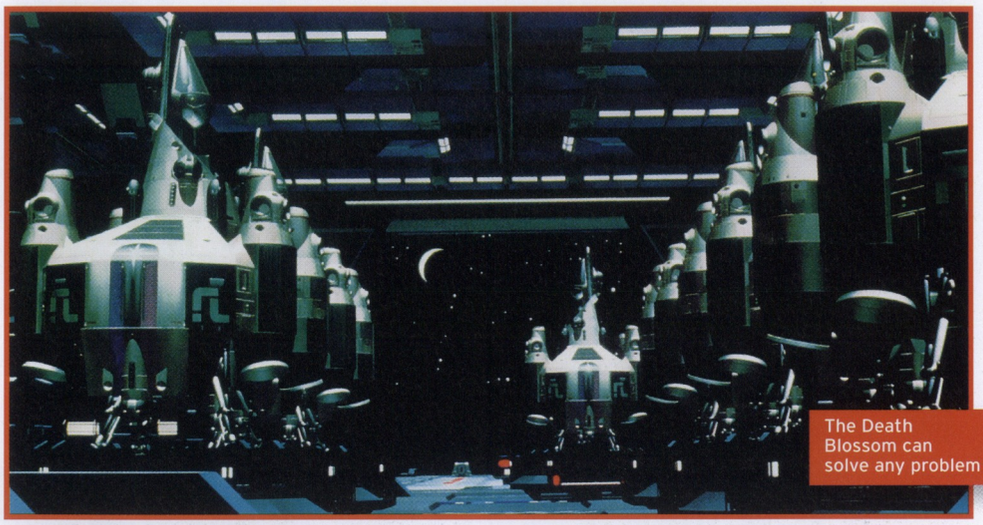
ELEANOR EIFFE

The Last Starfighter Effect: Will your leet skillz save the world?

Last weekend, I picked up a copy of the Guitar Hero songbook. I'd recently dusted off my old acoustic after years of neglect and I was looking for some music to practice with. My purchase made a lot of sense – it's a collection of songs I know, encompassing a range of skill levels, which were selected precisely because they are fun to play on the guitar – but I still felt silly taking that book to the checkout. There was something weirdly meta about the whole situation. I've mastered these songs on a pretend guitar, now I can struggle to play them on a real one! When I got home and fumbled my way through the opening bars of "More Than a Feeling", the gaping chasm between my Guitar Hero prowess and actual guitar ability couldn't have been more obvious. However, the situation made me wonder – are any of the skills we develop while playing games likely to be useful in any other context?

We know that games, in the form of purpose-built simulations, can be extremely useful teaching tools. Many pilots, soldiers and emergency services personnel have simulations or "serious games" incorporated into their training. Of course, it's not surprising that such games help their players develop useful real-world skills. They were developed explicitly for that purpose. (Incidentally, this is why Guitar Hero skills don't transfer well to the real thing. The game wasn't designed as an accurate guitar simulator – it was designed to capture the essence of rockin' out.) But I don't want to talk about simulations. I'm more interested in the games we play for fun. I want to know if there's even the slightest element of plausibility in those Last Starfighter-esque fantasies in which our leet skillz help us accomplish something of galactic importance. The time we spend playing games must add up to a lot of practice at... something. Even if we're not learning how to man the weapons of alien warship, surely we're picking up some skills that we can apply elsewhere, right?

In 2002, a group of American surgeons were wondering much the same thing. They'd observed that younger surgeons were much faster learners than their older colleagues when it came to laparoscopy. The researchers speculated that this might be because younger surgeons had grown up playing videogames, and therefore found it quite natural to manipulate surgical instruments while watching them on a monitor. Like any good scientists, the researchers turned their hunch into a hypothesis and did the experiment. A group of test subjects, including surgical residents and a few more experienced surgeons, were quizzed about their videogame habits and their experience with laparoscopic procedures. The subjects were then put through a series of laparoscopic training exercises and were rated on their performance. In the final phase of the experiment, the test subjects were plonked in front of three videogames they'd never seen before, given some basic instructions and then assessed on how well they played.



The Death Blossom can solve any problem

The researchers chose the three games (Super Monkey Ball 2, Star Wars Racer Revenge and Silent Scope, in case you were curious) because they involved skills such as hand-eye coordination, reaction time and fine motor control. When they tallied up the results, the researchers found significant correlations between gaming skills and laparoscopic skills. Subjects who had played games before outperformed lifelong non-gamers in the laparoscopy exercise by a factor of about 40%. Subjects who played games regularly at the time of study did about 25% better those who had let their gaming habits lapse. Unsurprisingly, the top performers in the gaming section of the study were also the top performers in the laparoscopy exercises. While the study only demonstrated a correlation between the two skill sets, which makes it impossible to definitively conclude that playing games will make you a better surgeon, the authors note that videogame skill and experience were better predictors of performance in the training than the surgeon's experience with actual laparoscopies. The authors advocated that video games (either purpose-built simulations or off-the-shelf entertainment titles) should be incorporated into surgeons' training as a way to develop and maintain hand-eye coordination and motor skills.

While the laproscopy study focussed on the effect of video games on manual dexterity, a 2007 study conducted at the University of Toronto found that playing action-oriented games has a profound impact on spatial attention. Spatial attention is the process by which we identify significant objects in our field of view. It's a low-level cognitive process which is also involved in higher-level tasks, such as visualising and mentally rotating a three-dimensional object. The University of Toronto researchers measured the spatial attention of a group of student volunteers. The researchers found a significant gender difference in spatial attention, with men outperforming women. They also found that science students did better than arts students and people who played videogames outperformed those that did not. Interestingly, the gender gap in the gaming group was so small as to be statistically insignificant. Moreover, female gamers performed better than male students who didn't play games. The researchers set up a second experiment, in which a group of non-gamers were evaluated before and after ten hours of "training" with Medal of Honour: Pacific Assault. The Medal of Honour group demonstrated significant improvements in spatial attention and performance in a mental rotation test, while the control group (who played a puzzle game) did not. Once again, the gender gap was insignificant in the action-gaming group, proving that even puny female brains can reap the benefits gaming provides.

Toronto U found that playing action-oriented games has a profound impact on spatial attention

So we've demonstrated that twitch gaming will give you nimble fingers and improve your visual cognition – but what does mean in practical terms? (And what about the skills we can pick up from other genres? A question for another time, perhaps.) The University of Toronto group point out that there's a strong association between spatial cognitive abilities and aptitude in maths and science. It's quite possible that all that time you spent playing Half-Life could set you up to become a real-life Gordon Freeman. Sans crowbar, of course.

THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $30

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Fifa 2009	Sports
2	▲	Singstar Hottest Hits (S/W)	Family
3	▼	Wall-E	Adventure
4	▲	Singstar Hottest Hits Bundle	Family
5	▼	Star Wars Force Unleashed	Action
6	◆	Singstar Amped (S/W)	Family
7	▲	Iron Man	Action
8	▲	Need For Speed Pro Street	Racing
9	▲	Singstar 80S (S/W)	Family
10	▲	Singstar Party (S/W)	Family

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $30

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Drawn To Life: Spongebob	Adventure
2	▲	Guitar Hero: On Tour Bundle	Family
3	▼	Brain Training	Family
4	▼	Wall-E	Adventure
5	▲	My Secret World	Family
6	▼	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Sports
7	▼	More Brain Training	Family
8	▲	High School Muscial	Family
9	✪	Ben 10	Adventure
10	▼	Mario Kart	Racing

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Wii Fit	Family
2	◆	Wii Play W/ Remote	Family
3	◆	Mario Kart W/ Wheel	Racing
4	▲	Wall-E	Adventure
5	▼	Super Smash Bros Brawl	Fighting
6	▼	Star Wars Force Unleashed	Action
7	▼	De Blob	Action
8	▲	Samba De Amigo	Family
9	◆	Fifa 2009	Sports
10	▲	Lego SW: Complete Saga	Adventure

TOP 10 Playstation 3 Games Over $60

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Fifa 2009	Sports
2	◆	Star Wars Force Unleashed	Action
3	✪	Nba 2K9	Sports
4	✪	Nba Live 2009	Sports
5	▼	Brothers In Arms Hells	Shooter
6	▼	Grand Theft Auto Iv	Action
7	▼	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns	Action
8	▲	Battlefield Bad Company	Shooter
9	◆	Race Driver Grid	Racing
10	▲	Buzz Quiz Tv Bundle	Family

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Spore	Simulation
2	▼	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	Simulation
3	▲	The Sims 2: Bon Voyage	Simulation
4	▼	Warhammer Online Age	Role-Playing
5	◆	Crysis Warhead	Shooter
6	◆	The Sims 2	Simulation
7	▼	The Sims 2 Free Time	Simulation
8	▲	The Sims 2: Pets	Simulation
9	▲	The Sims 2: Open Business	Simulation
10	▼	The Sims 2: Seasons	Simulation

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Fifa 2009	Sports Games
2	◆	Star Wars Force Unleashed	Action
3	✪	Nba 2K9	Sports Games
4	✪	Nba Live 2009	Sports Games
5	▼	Brothers In Arms Hells	Shooter
6	◆	Halo 3	Shooter
7	▼	Grand Theft Auto Iv	Action
8	◆	Battlefield Bad Company	Shooter
9	▲	Pure	Racing
10	▼	Call Of Duty 4 Modern Goty	Shooter

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Wii Fit Wii	Nintendo Wii
2	✪	Drawn To Life:Spongebob	Nintendo DS
3	◆	Wii Play W/ Remote	Nintendo Wii
4	▲	Mario Kart W/ Wheel	Nintendo Wii
5	✪	Wall-E	Nintendo Wii
6	▼	Fifa 2009	PlayStation 3
7	▼	Fifa 2009	PlayStation 2
8	◆	Singstar Hottest Hits (S/W)	PlayStation 2
9	▼	Fifa 2009	Xbox 360
10	▼	Wall-E	PlayStation 2

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 12th October 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Fifa 2009	Sports
2	◆	Star Wars Force Unleashed	Action
3	◆	Wall-E	Adventure
4	✪	NBA Live 2009	Sports
5	◆	Buzz Master Quiz	Family
6	◆	Madden Nfl 2009	Sports
7	▲	Final Fantasy Vii Crisis Core	Role-Playing
8	▼	Secret Agent Clank	Adventure
9	▲	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
10	▲	Need For Speed Pro Street	Racing

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

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GfK's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly

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NEXT ISSUE: HOW TO MAKE A GAME!

Killzone 2, Resident Evil 5, Prince of Persia, Tomb Raider: Underworld, Mirror's Edge, Fallout 3

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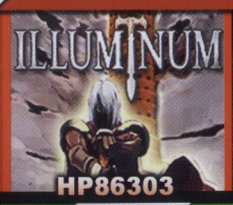

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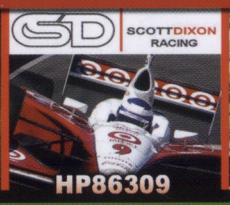

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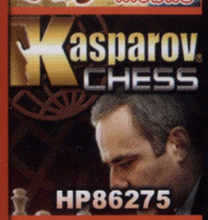

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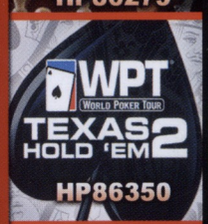

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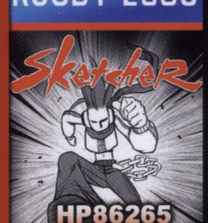

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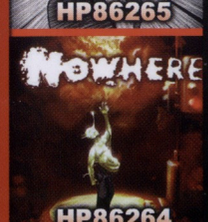

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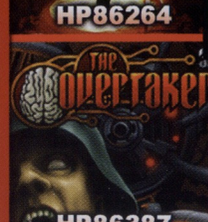

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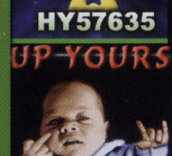

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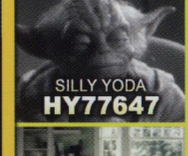

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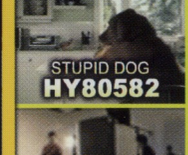

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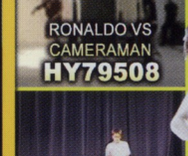

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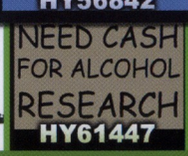

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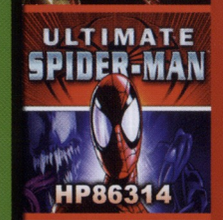

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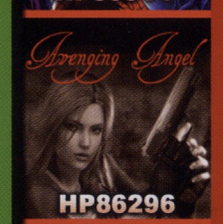

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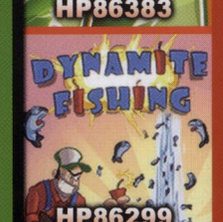

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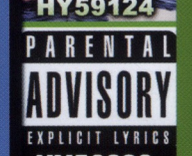

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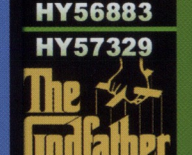

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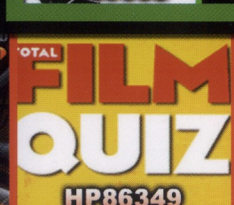

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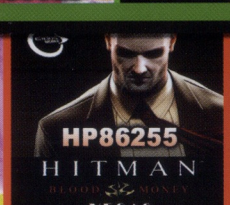

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