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HYPER

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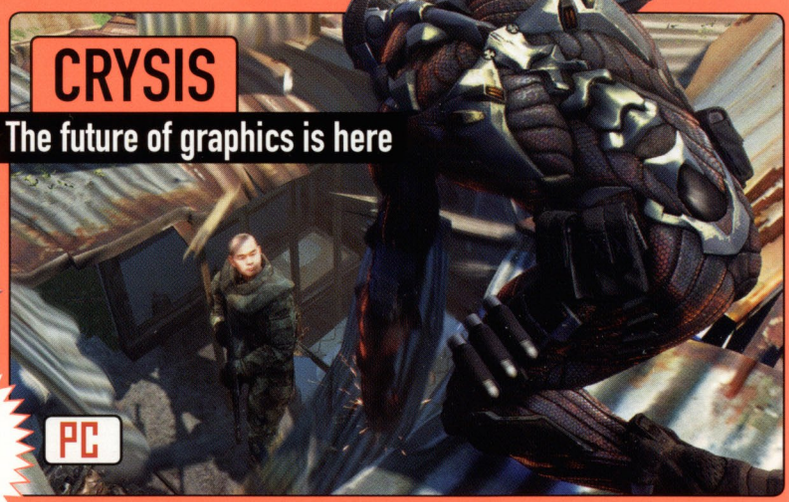
X360 / PS3 / PC



CRYSIS

The future of graphics is here

PC

PLUS: PSP 2000 DETAILS

GAMES OF THE FUTURE

THE KILLER GAMES OF 2007 & BEYOND

LITTLEBIG PLANET

Community platforming

PS3

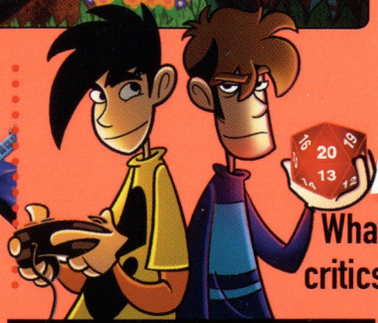
NIGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

A forgotten classic reborn

Wii

GUITAR HERO 80'S

No Def Leppard!
No Van Halen!



PENNY ARCADE

What happens when critics make a game?

ZELDA on DS

Hand Held Genius!

BIOSHOCK

Irrational Speaks Out!

FAR CRY 2

Feel the Rains in Africa!

BEOWULF

Tear The Arm Off Grendel!

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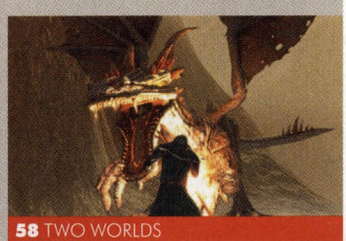

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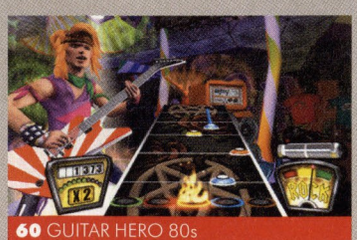

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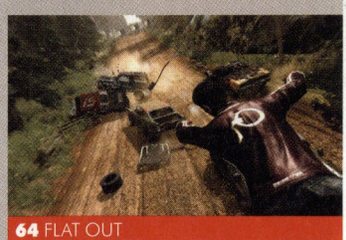

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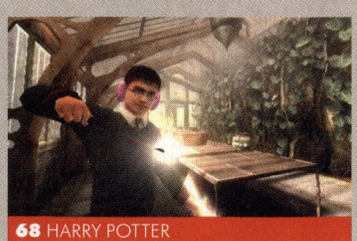

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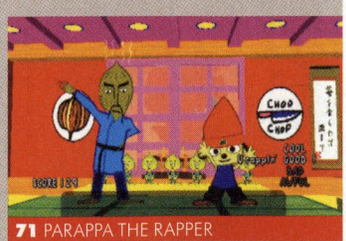
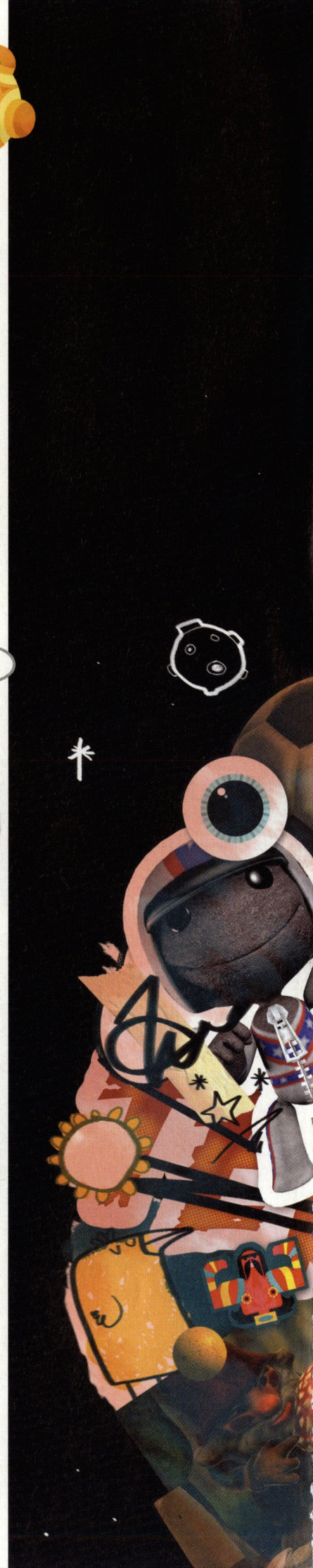


71 PARAPPA THE RAPPER



12 GAMES OF THE FUTURE
Assassin's Creed, Little Big Planet, and more!
me.
play.
my levels
my objects
my photos
my sounds
remove from friends
shop.
FUN.
Start

HYPER»
SEPTEMBER 2007 ISSUE 167

Editorial

>>So the new look E3 has come and gone without leaving much of a dent on the gaming world. Little new was announced, making the show a far more sombre event than it has been in recent years as far as games excitement goes. The general consensus so far seems to be a fairly mixed bag. Journos have been praising the better access to developers in the hotel suites and not having to yell over demo machines, show floors filled with sweaty overweight throngs to be heard in interviews but on the other hand the distance between the hotels meant even more running about than previous years and the scheduling of everything at the same time meant people had to choose between press conferences and hotel visits. The actual show floor was also distanced far enough from the hotels to make it a real chore to get to and a time consuming one at that. It remains to be seen whether this format will remain for the next E3 or whether it will be revised again but safe money seems to be on the latter option.

All that aside, welcome to Hyper #167. Once again I think we have a pretty kick-arse issue for you with features ranging from the best of E3 to games being used for propaganda purposes, an interview with the boys from Penny Arcade and a review of Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, a game that has entered our hearts, minds, DSs and Hyper history as one of our highest scoring games ever.

Now it's time to go to the pub

Daniel Wilks >>Editor

Hyper Crew

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **Blue Dragon** – *Xbox 360*
   "Kickin' it old school"
2. **Puzzle Quest** – *DS*
3. **Guitar Hero 80s** – *PS2*
4. **Harry Potter: Phoenix** – *Wii*
5. **Two Worlds** – *PC*

MOE – Deputy Editor

1. **Flat Out: Ultimate Destruction** – *Xbox 360*
   "Smashing stuff and going fast is sweet!"
2. **Guitar Hero 80s** – *PS2*
3. **Crush** – *PSP*
4. **Transformers** – *Xbox 360*
5. **The Darkness** – *Xbox 360*

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **More Brain Training** – *DS*
   "Just like the TV ads, my wife is smarter than me."
2. **Animal Crossing** – *DS*
3. **Final Fantasy XII** – *PS2*
4. **One Piece Grand Adventure** – *PS2*
5. **Katamari** – *PS2*

JONTI DAVIES – Man in Japan

1. **Taito Memories, Vol 2** – *PS2*
   "This is a Taito approved household"
2. **Phantom Hourglass** – *DS*
3. **Cosmic Smash** – *Dreamcast*
4. **Outrun 2006** – *PS2*
5. **Bakuretsu Muteki Bangaioh**

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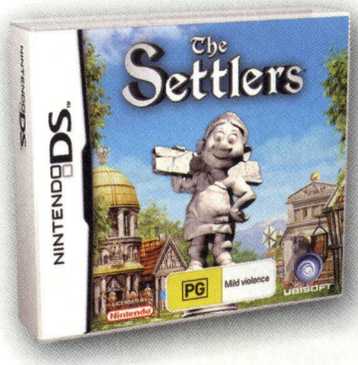

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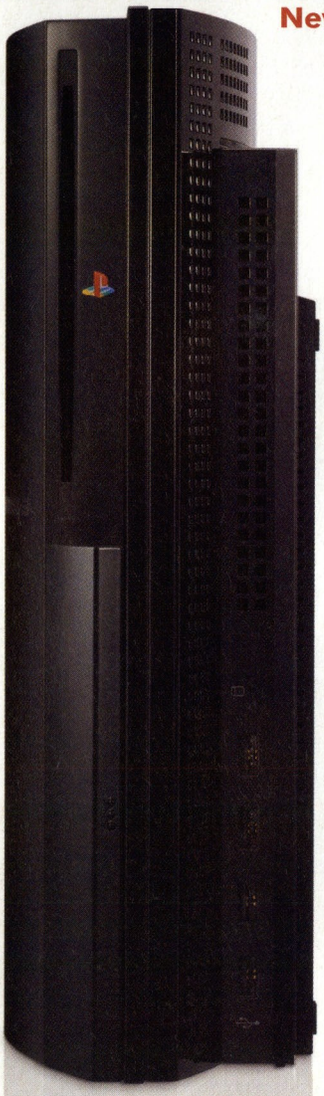
SPEND!

American PS3 Price Cut

New 80GB console to replace old stock



This month there has been a seemingly endless supply of big announcements regarding Sony's PlayStation 3. At the 2007 Electronic Entertainment Expo, held this month in Los Angeles, Sony unveiled that not only a would they be releasing a new PlayStation 3 console that includes an 80GB hard drive, but they also announced a price cut for the existing 60GB consoles.

While the 80GB pack will now assume the premium US$599 price tag (approx AU$682), the 60GB consoles will be sold for US$100 cheaper at US$499 (approx AU$568).

The price drop comes with a catch, however, with President and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, Kazuo Hirai, announcing that the 60GB PlayStation 3 has been discontinued, and that after the existing units of the 60GB model sells out, they will not be replenishing stock, essentially leaving American consumers with the same priced console with an extra 20GB of HDD space.

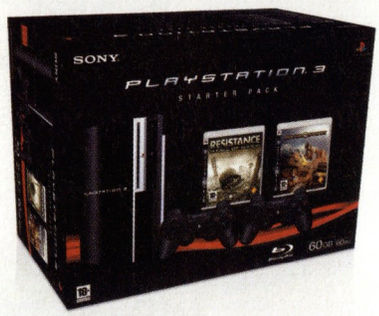
One last catch is that all future PlayStation 3 consoles starting with the new 80GB model will no longer include the Emotion chipset, the hardware that allows the PS3 perfect backwards compatibility with PSone and PS2 games. Instead Sony will be using the same software solution that is included in PAL PS3 consoles.

It would take until after E3 for news to surface on whether PAL territories (Europe, Australia and New Zealand) would be seeing any of the announced price cuts and hardware upgrades, but unfortunately there was very little good news to be had.

Sony Computer Entertainment Europe President, David Reeves, announced that Europe (and by extension, that means Australia/New Zealand) will be receiving neither the new 80GB PS3, nor a price cut. Instead, PAL territories will receive a "starter pack" which for the standard price of AU$999, will land you a console, two SixAxis controllers and two games, which will reportedly include the likes of MotorStorm and Resistance: Fall of Man.

Given that for the price of one Australian PS3 you could almost buy two 60GB American PS3's, it doesn't really seem like a fair trade off.

The American 80Gb Bundle



The UK "Starter" pack

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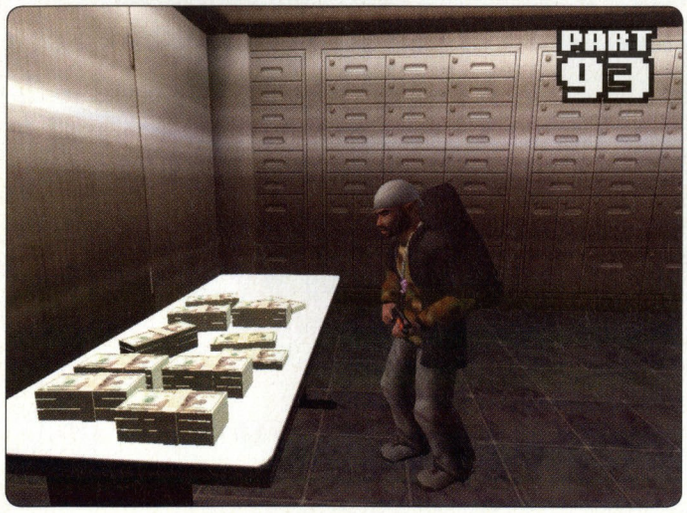


I demand that you caption me!

BORK!

Microsoft Extends Xbox 360 Warrantee

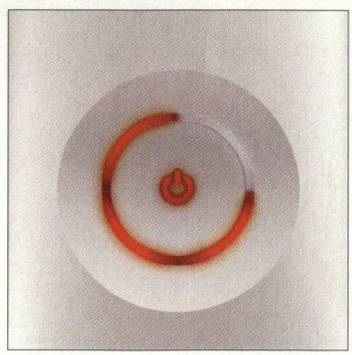
Protection against "three red lights" increased to three years

Incidents of the Xbox 360's "three red lights of death" have been haunting Internet message boards and our own Hyper mailbag for quite some time now, and until now Microsoft were reluctant to admit that there was a problem with the Xbox 360's hardware. Now it seems that Microsoft have swallowed that bitter pill and fessed up, with the recently-resigned Corporate Vice-President of the Xbox division, Peter Moore, admitting that the company has "not been doing a good enough job" in their customer service department, and that to remedy that fact, Microsoft will be extending the Xbox 360's warrantee to protect consumer from "general hardware failures" (the official term for the red lights) for three years instead of one.

The new warrantee applies to all Xbox 360 users, and is valid three years from the purchase date of the console. Microsoft have even announced that they will retroactively reimburse anyone who has paid for Microsoft to repair an Xbox 360 that suffered a general hardware failure. The three-year extension only applies to general hardware failures, and for all other malfunctions the standard one-year warrantee will still apply.

While Microsoft still maintains that incidents of Xbox 360 general hardware failures have always been at an acceptable level, the extension of their warrantee and retroactive reimbursements for previous repairs is a definite sign of goodwill for the company.

Better yet, this is indeed a worldwide announcement, so Australian Xbox 360 owners too will be able to reap the benefits.



Wii Zapper Gun Revealed

Racing Wheel and Wii Fit Peripheral also announced.

The Wii remote is already perfect for light-gun games right out of the box, but it doesn't really feel very convincing when you're shooting ducks with something the shape of a TV remote. Nintendo have the solution, however, and at their E3 press conference they finally revealed the final design of their Wii Zapper peripheral.

Looking somewhat like a futuristic assault rifle the Zapper is actually just a shell, into which you can place a Wii remote and nunchuk. The nunchuk functions as the rear handle and trigger, whilst the Zapper shell adds another handle at the front of the unit, including a trigger that activates the Wiimote's Z button.

The peripheral looks plenty cool, and apparently several games are already being developed to fully utilise the Wii Zapper, including Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles and Medal of Honor Heroes 2, among others.

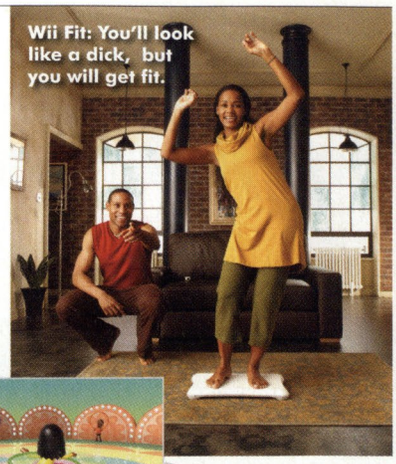
Two other hardware revelations from this year's E3 include a Wii steering wheel for racing games, and an intriguing peripheral called the Wii Balance Board, which will be used in the game Wii Fit.

While Nintendo haven't yet released any decent photographs of the Wii Wheel (possibly because its design is yet to be finalised) Nintendo of America's President and CEO, Reggie Fils-Aime, did hold one aloft during his E3 presentation, with the wheel looking like it will function just like a Wii remote, only this time, it's shaped like a wheel. Nintendo also announced that the Wii Wheel will be bundled with Mario Kart Wii, which is slated for release sometime in the first half of 2008.

After the Wii Zapper, the Balance Board is probably the most interesting new peripheral announcement for the Wii. Looking like a cross between a set of bathroom scales and an exercise step, the Balance Board is essentially exactly that.

The Balance Board will take your weight and monitor it as you play Wii Fit, a health and exercise-based game, allowing you to track your weight loss or gain over the months. The Balance Board will also require you stand on it, use it as a step, balance on it with one foot, and use it to do push-ups among other activities.

Something tells us that those reports of gamers losing weight while playing Wii are going to skyrocket...



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SHRINK!

Sony Announce PSP 2000

Only seven years too late

We've been expecting Sony to announce a PSP redesign for a while now, but at this year's E3 conference they finally let it out of the bag. Clocking in at 19% slimmer and 33% lighter than the previous model, the newly designed hardware, called the PSP 2000 (despite it now being the year 2007...) doesn't actually look too dissimilar from the original, with the only immediately noticeable difference being that the two bulges at the back of the unit have been removed.

Upon closer inspection, however, other differences include that the entire console has now been given a glossy finish, instead of just the front panel (which means more fingerprints to wipe off for you), and that the infrared port has been removed, since it was never used in the first place.

Also included will be a video-out port, which will allow users to play both games and their now-obsolete UMD movies on their big screen TVs. Or you could just play all those mpeg4-encoded movies you've got on your memory stick, just like everyone else who didn't buy UMD movies will.

The new PSP will have more RAM than the previous model, which will help games load faster and play smoothe. Reports are mixed however on what the PSP 2000's battery life will be, with some sources saying it has been greatly improved, while a local Sony representative told us that it will remain essentially the same.

The release date for the new PSP has been set as sometime in September of this year, and it is expected to release in all regions simultaneously in a variety of different colours, including "Piano Black", "Ceramic White", and "Ice Silver".

If only for the possibility of better battery life, the PSP 2000 looks like a change for the better.

QUIT!

Peter Moore Resigns From Microsoft

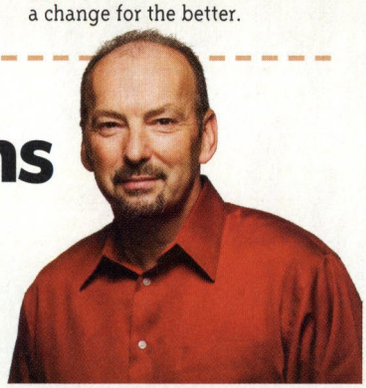
And joins Electronic Arts for $1.5 Million...

In a move that has surprised many, Peter Moore, the Corporate Vice-President of Microsoft's Xbox division, has resigned from his position at the company and accepted a new role at games publisher Electronic Arts.

Moore will now head up the EA Sports division, with the move netting Moore a reported 1.5 million (US) dollars.

Since his appointment at Microsoft Moore has become a popular figure in the videogame industry at large. In particular, Moore is best known for his press conferences at the Electronic Entertainment Expos in both 2004 and 2006 where he unveiled the respective release dates for Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto IV by getting the game's logos tattooed on each of his arms, or "guns" as he was fond of calling them. While there is still speculation about whether both tattoos were real, or just skilfully done make-up jobs, numerous reports confirm that Moore still has that Halo 2 tat on his right bicep.

Moore now looks to put his colourful personality to good use on Electronic Arts' range of sports titles, a job that will see him working on software for both Microsoft and his former rivals at Sony and Nintendo. Something that Sony were quick to capitalise on with President and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Jack Tretton, announcing that he wished Peter all the best in his role at Electronic Arts, and that we was looking forward to working with him on future releases on Sony platforms.



"I'M RICH, BIATCH!!!"

Apart from the $1.5 million (USD) offered by EA, the motivation behind Moore's departure is said to be family reasons, with Moore reportedly admitting that he wanted to relocate his family to live in the San Francisco area, which was a possibility with EA, but not with Microsoft.

Whatever the reasoning, we're certain that Peter Moore will continue to be a public figure in the games industry. Perhaps he'll even turn up with a few new tattoos to announce the latest FIFA or Madden releases.

OVERFLOW

In an unexpected move, Nintendo have been driven to recall copies of Mario Party 8 from the United Kingdom after numerous complaints that the game's use of the word "spastic" insults sufferers of cerebral palsy.

Despite the fact that the game's use of the word was in its legitimate capacity: in relating to the occurrence of spasms, and not specifically to a cerebral palsy sufferer, Nintendo still caved in and pulled the game from store shelves. Bless their considerate hearts.

Mac users rejoice, Epic Games have confirmed that ports of both the Xbox 360 hit Gears of War and on of the biggest upcoming PC shooters, Unreal Tournament 3, will be making their way to a Mac near you. Epic Games' Vice-President Mark Rein made the surprise announcement in a video later broadcast via gametrailers.com, in which he tells viewers not to forget that both Gears and UT3 are Mac-bound.

Despite the fact that the prices of their downloadable content have long been considered extortionate, Activision have decided not to review the price of their Xbox Live song packs, because people have been more than willing to part with their cash for the current cost. At 500 Microsoft points the packs equate to about AU$8.25 each, and yet, Activision have still sold 300,000 of the packs around the world. Which just goes to show how easily a fool and his money are parted.

Sony have finally crossed the 1 million PS3 unit mark in Japan this month. According the Japanese market research firm Enterbrain, the PS3 has sold 1.01 million consoles in Japan as of July 15, compared with the 2.9 million sold by the Nintendo Wii and approximately 420,700 Xbox 360's sold in Japan during the same time period.

BAD COP NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

A rose by any other name

Modern naming conventions when it comes to consoles are a strange thing, a phenomenon we have witnessed no less than three times in recent years with the release of the Xbox 360, the Wii and now the PSP 2000.

It makes sense that Microsoft wouldn't want to call their second Xbox an Xbox 2. In the eye of the consumer that would put the Xbox 2 a generation behind the PS3 simply because of the numeral on the front of the box. Of course the 360 in the title still gives us pause and makes us wonder what the next iteration of the console will be called. If they name it, for example, an Xbox 480 then it will look to the average consumer that it is in the same generation of development as the PS4 but it will look like an iterative upgrade over the 360 as there is only a difference of 120 rather than 360. Calling the console a 540 puts the next gen Xbox one generation ahead of he PS4 but suffers from the same problem as the 480 – the number isn't as big a leap a 360 was over Xbox. Calling the console an Xbox 720 seems like the only option if the current number scheme is to hold up. Such a name gives the console an equal distance from the 360 as the 360 has from the original Xbox. Unfortunately calling it a 720 also puts the console 3 generations ahead of the PS4, quite possibly increasing the consumer expectations for the console to a point it simply can't meet. There's also that nagging question of why the hell the console is spinning on the spot. What to do?

On the topic of numbers, Sony have just announced their revised PSP and called it, of all things, the PSP 2000. As far as names go, I'm not sure they could have chosen a worse one. Calling it a PSP 2000, simply due to the virtue of the 2 at the front of the number makes the revised handheld look like a new generation of PSP, something it is not. Following on from that though, calling a 2000 just seems to muddy the water. The first reaction from everyone we talked to at the Sony event at which the PSP was shown was, "Isn't that seven years too late?"

Now I'm not pretending to know the minds of Sony executives but if I put my tinfoil hat on it seems to me that the name serves dual purpose for them. Firstly, the name revitalises the PSP brand, making it seem like a totally new machine rather than just a slightly lighter revision. Secondly, the name distances the PSP 2000 from the competing systems made by Nintendo, a company that has hit pay dirt time and time again with its revised handhelds. Calling the revised PSP a 2000 rather than a PSP Lite (for example, using the precedent set by the DS) effectively puts the PSP in a different race.

Finally we come to the Wii, the console with the silliest name of the lot. It's also the console with the cleverest name. By refusing to put a number on the console, Nintendo have placed their machine outside of the console race. By taking it out of the console wars with a name that does not buy into generational conventions, Nintendo have placed their console in a position that excludes it from being compared to the graphically far more powerful Xbox 360 and PS3. There's also the simple fact that Wii is such a stupid sounding name that it genuinely sticks in the mind.

Where am I going with this long-winded rant about names? Well, I suppose what I'm trying to get at is that names are nothing but a marketing tool and like all marketing tools they obfuscate the truth. The 360 may have a big number with a 3 in it but the simple truth is that Microsoft are a generation behind when it comes to console development (not the actual console mind you) and have made some rookie mistakes, the recent red ring scandal coming to mind. Although they may want to distance themselves from the DS by saying it can play movies, music and the like, the PSP and PSP 2000 are still in direct competition with the DS and it's a competition the PSP can't possibly win, no matter what numbers follow the logo.

PRESS PASS

DANIEL STAINES

Know thy enemy

For over twenty years now, the psychological and social impact of videogames has been the target of intense public scrutiny. Politicians, media-pundits, academics, and lawyers have all at one time or another come banging on the gates of Castle Mario, pitchfork and torch in hand, howling for the blood of the monster within. In most cases, their righteous outrage is born of ignorance and opportunism, and so we in the specialist press delight in dousing them with cauldrons of scalding vitriol.

But in that zeal to defend our lifestyle, we have grown careless and indiscriminate. Accustomed to fending off lunatics like Jack Thompson, members of the gaming media are quick to dismiss claims that games might be harmful as shrill technophobia, even when said claims are backed by compelling empirical evidence.

In the last few years, there have been numerous studies conducted on the cognitive effects of violent videogames, and the results have been unanimously grim. For instance, a recent experiment conducted by Vincent Matthews at Indiana University has shown that playing violent games increases activity in areas of the brain commonly associated with aggressive behaviour, while simultaneously decreasing activity in areas associated with inhibition. An earlier study conducted by Bruce Barthalow at the University of Missouri found that "acute and chronic exposure to videogame violence is associated with increased aggression". These are just two voices in what is quickly becoming a choir of concern.

Of course, you probably haven't heard of these studies because we in the games press have (mostly) failed to talk about them. Instead we sit around and wait for people like the aforementioned Mr. Thompson to say something ridiculous, and then we rush out with all guns blazing, not realising that we're really just shooting fish in a barrel. By failing to engage with the real issues raised by legitimate research, we are cutting ourselves out of a conversation that could have profound implications for the future of videogames, and thus do our readers – and the industry at large – a considerable disservice.

Although it's nice to pretend otherwise, the fact is that we simply don't know if exposure to certain videogames has the potential to cause long-term psychological harm. The science is so far suggestive, but certainly not conclusive, and the scientific community will likely be divided on the issue for some time to come. We in the gaming media need to jump into this debate before it's too late; we need to tackle these studies head-on, to analyse and criticise their results, and draw out their implications for games and gamers in general.

Beating dead horses like Thompson is easy (and fun), but it doesn't do us any good in the long run. We pride ourselves on being the defenders of the videogame industry, and yet we continue to ignore what may be the greatest threat of all – our own ignorance.

Until next month.

daniels@next.com.au

GAMES OF THE FUTURE

X360/PS3/PC

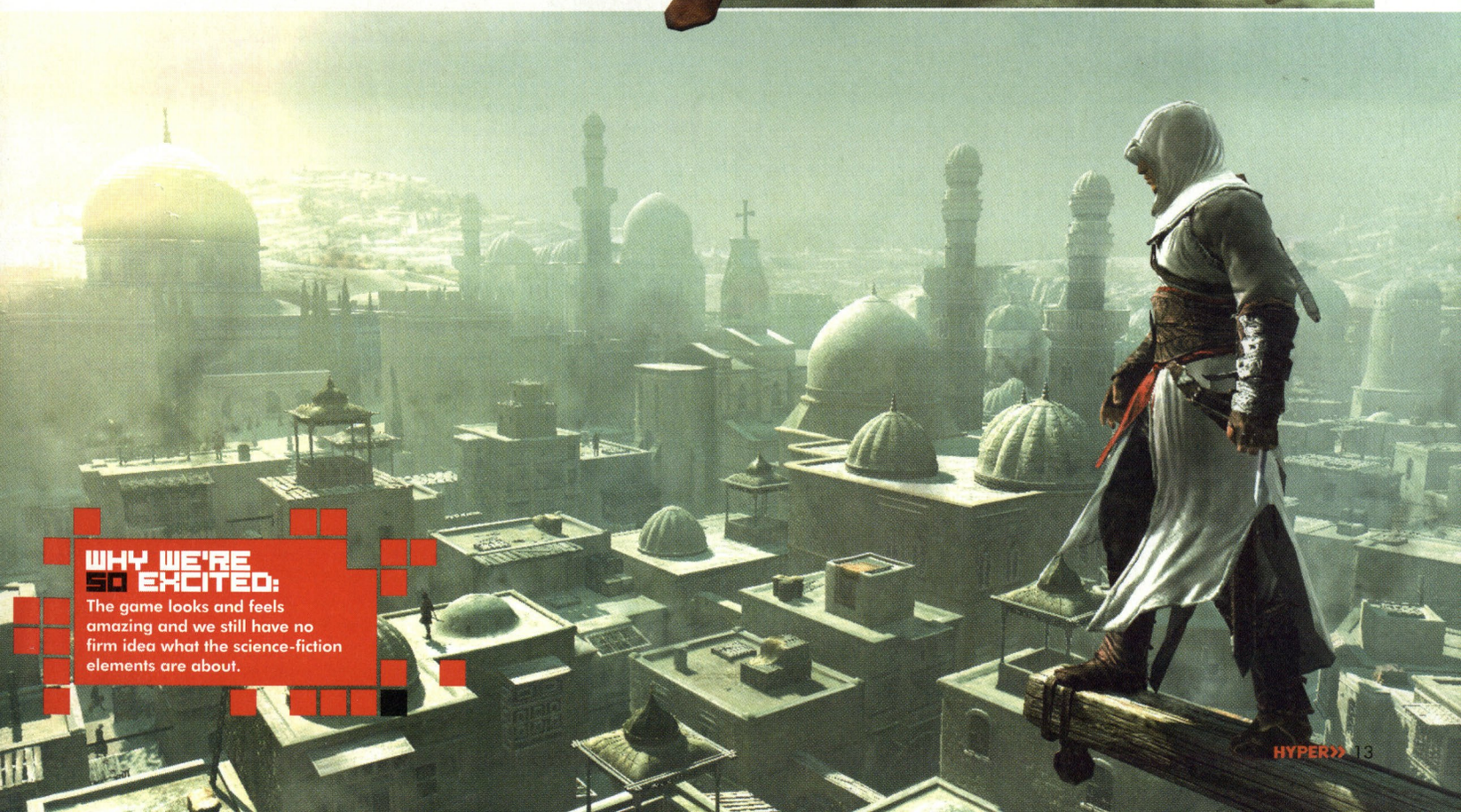
ASSASSIN'S CREED

GENRE: **ACTION** ■ PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL** ■ DUE: **LATE 2007**

One of the most exciting new IPs just keeps on getting even more exciting the more we see of it. The E3 hands on demo, whilst not assuaging everyone's fears about whether or not the game will have long enough legs to keep players entertained throughout the experience made us want the game even more. What we feared may have been rather button mashy controls for the free-running are instead a simple press and hold of a trigger and a button and steering with the thumbstick. That has been the revelation of E3 – the controls of Assassin's Creed are designed to be simple and approachable. Each of the face buttons represents part of Altair's body; A is his feet, enabling jumping, dodging, free running and the like depending on the context, X and B control his arms and Y the head. Triggers modify the buttons, turning an attack into a counter or a jump into a rolling dodge, for example.

We also now know that each hit will be split into different sections – scouting the job, finding the target, the chase and the getaway – each element having its own specific play style; while you may be able to explore in the open to scope out a target's movements, actually getting to the target may require a mixture of stealth, subterfuge and misdirection to pull off, the chase to actually kill the target could be a simple foot chase or a bounding race across rooftops and the escape can be a battle to the death against guards or simply blending in with the crowd.

New gameplay elements aside, Assassin's Creed remains one of the best looking games to be coming out this year and is definitely the game we maintain is the poster-child for the "next-gen".



WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:

The game looks and feels amazing and we still have no firm idea what the science-fiction elements are about.

NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

Wii

GENRE: **ACTION** ■ PLAYERS: **1-2**
DEVELOPER: **SEGA** ■ DUE: **NOVEMBER 2007**

Has it really been more than a decade since the original Nights into Dreams released on the Sega Saturn? I suppose it has, but to celebrate Sega have made all of their fanboys' wildest dreams come true: they're finally heading back to Nightopia for a Journey of Dreams.

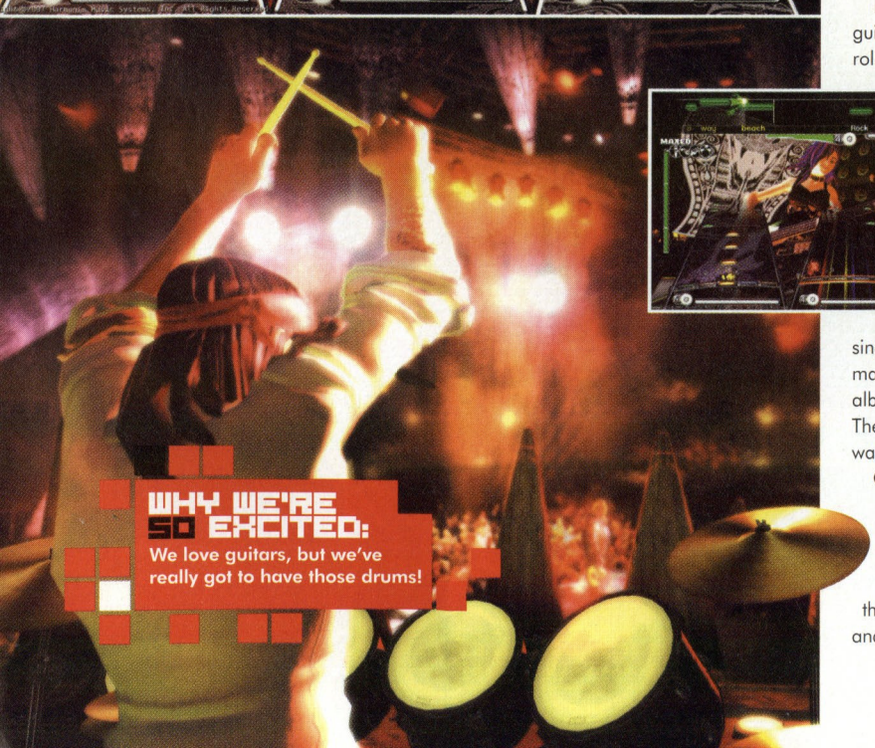
This long awaited sequel looks to feature the same Jester-flying, orb-collecting gameplay that made the original such a cult favourite, although visually Nightopia looks expectedly better than it did more than a decade ago.

You'll guide Nights, the aforementioned airborne Jester, around a colourful dreamland locked into a pre-determined 2D path, with your main preoccupation being to collect a variety of orbs to rescue the "ideya", or life force, of a dreaming child using every acrobatic move in your arsenal.

While Sega haven't yet revealed whether the game will feature motion-control or pointer-control features via the Wiimote, they have confirmed that the game will be able to be controlled with both the nunchuk and the Wiimote, or with the Wiimote alone. Personally, we feel that Nights would be a perfect candidate for full motion-controls, but we'll just have to wait and see what Sega have planned for us.

Whether or not Sega will be including enough new game features to make it significantly different to the Saturn original is yet to be seen, but we are very anxious to find out.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
The original Nights was sublime, and we expect nothing less from this belated sequel.



WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
We love guitars, but we've really got to have those drums!

ROCK BAND

X360/PS3

GENRE: **MUSIC** ■ PLAYERS: **1-4**
DEVELOPER: **HARMONIX** ■ DUE: **DECEMBER 2007**

If there's any music game that could give Guitar Hero a run for its money, Rock Band is that game.

Boasting a complete set of drums and vocals to accompany the wailing of two guitars, Rock Band is looking ever more likely to usurp the current king of rock 'n' roll and take its place as the reigning god of rock.

Like Guitar Hero III, Rock Band is also gunning for more master tracks, instead of the hit-and-miss cover tracks used in other games. Just a few of the master tracks in the game include Blue Öyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper", Metallica's "Enter Sandman", "In Bloom" by Nirvana, David Bowie's "Suffragette City" and The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again". Other confirmed artists include Black Sabbath, Foo Fighters, The Ramones, The Strokes, Bon Jovi and more.

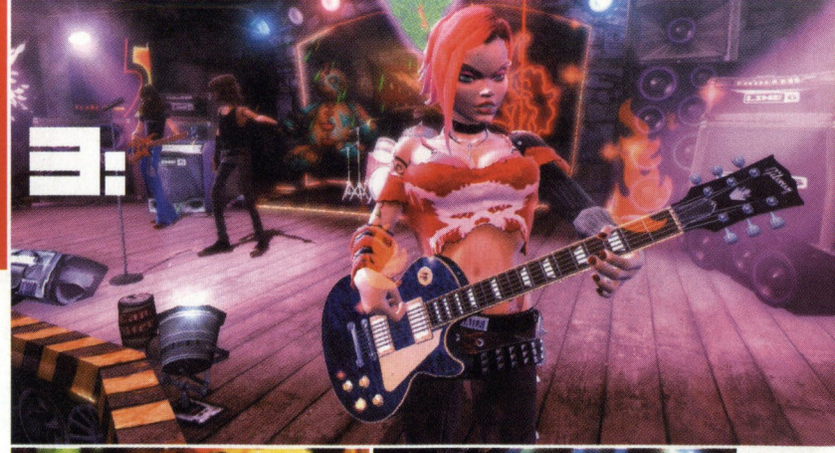
What's more Harmonix have announced that every single week after the games release there will be new downloadable content made available, including full albums from one artist. The first full album made available will reportedly be Who's Next by The Who, which coincidentally is the exact question we're wanting to ask about Harmonix's future online releases.

Of course the replica Fender Stratocasters look great and the microphone will be fun to shout into, but the drums look to be Rock Band's most defining feature over Guitar Hero. The drum playing in Rock Band is apparently so realistic that if you can master the drums on the game's expert mode then you will actually be able to get on a real set of drums and play like a pro... that'll save us a packet on lessons!

PS2/PS3/X360/Wii

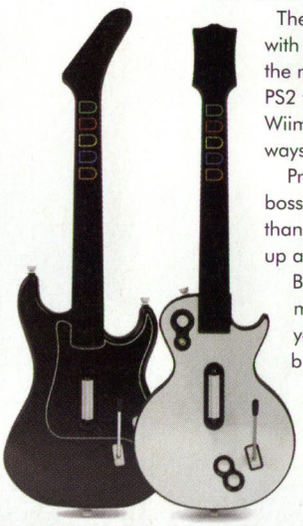
GUITAR HERO 3: LEGENDS OF ROCK

GENRE: **MUSIC** ■ PLAYERS: **1-2**
DEVELOPER: **NEVERSOFT** ■ DUE: **DECEMBER 2007**



With Rock Band looking ever-more enticing, you may be wondering what the Guitar Hero series has up its sleeve for its next outing, and so were we.

The series' new developer, Neversoft, have significantly bumped up the detail and quality of GH3's visuals, but the real windfall is the new track listing. GH3 will feature more than 45 songs, many of them original master tracks, from bands like The Rolling Stones ("Paint it Black"), Alice Cooper ("School's Out"), KISS ("Rock and Roll All Nite") and plenty more.



The new guitar peripherals also look better than ever, with a replica white Gibson Les Paul (wireless of course) for the next gen versions, and a black Gibson Kramer for the PS2 version. The Wii guitar even has a slot to attach your Wiimote, which will potentially give the Wii version far more ways to activate Star Power.

Probably the biggest GH3 news to come out of E3, is the boss battles. The first boss to be announced is none other than Slash, of Guns 'n' Roses fame, who will no doubt put up a formidable fight on the frets.

Both the boss battles and a new "battle" multiplayer mode will also feature a variety of attacks that you can use against your opponent. You can break your opponents strings, make their note indicators flash erratically or render their guitar unresponsive all with the touch of a button. While we're a little bit sceptical of this gimmicky approach, at least Neversoft are tying something new.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
If it's good enough for Slash, it's good enough for us.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
This really does look like BioWare's biggest and best, and that's very, very exciting.

X360

MASS EFFECT

GENRE: **RPG** ■ PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **BIOWARE** ■ DUE: **NOVEMBER 2007**

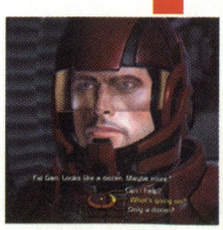
Throwing you into a elaborate tale of intergalactic conflict, ancient alien prophecies and a friend-turned-supervillain who wants the entire human race dead, Mass Effect looks to be BioWare's biggest and best game yet, and with a pedigree like theirs, that's saying something.

For starters the game offers an entire galaxy of exploration and adventure. When you first see Mass Effect's galactic map, it's focused on only one planetary system, but by zooming out, and out, and out further, you can go from a solar system level to a galactic level, with literally hundreds of planets in between. While you can't land on every planet, all of them can be scanned using you ships sensors, and will provide vital information for your overarching quest.

Quite unlike BioWare's previous works, Mass Effect's combat is entirely in real-time, and even has elements of a squad-based tactical shooter infused with it. According to BioWare the player will be able choose to be entirely focused on action, or can dig deeper into the game's strategy side which will play not dissimilarly to a game of Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter.

The latest info from E3 is that every single line of dialogue in the game will be spoken by a recorded voice actor, with the likes of Lance Henriksen, Seth Green, Marina Sirtis and Keith David contributing their talents to the game. From all the audio we've heard from the game so far, their performances are quite remarkable.

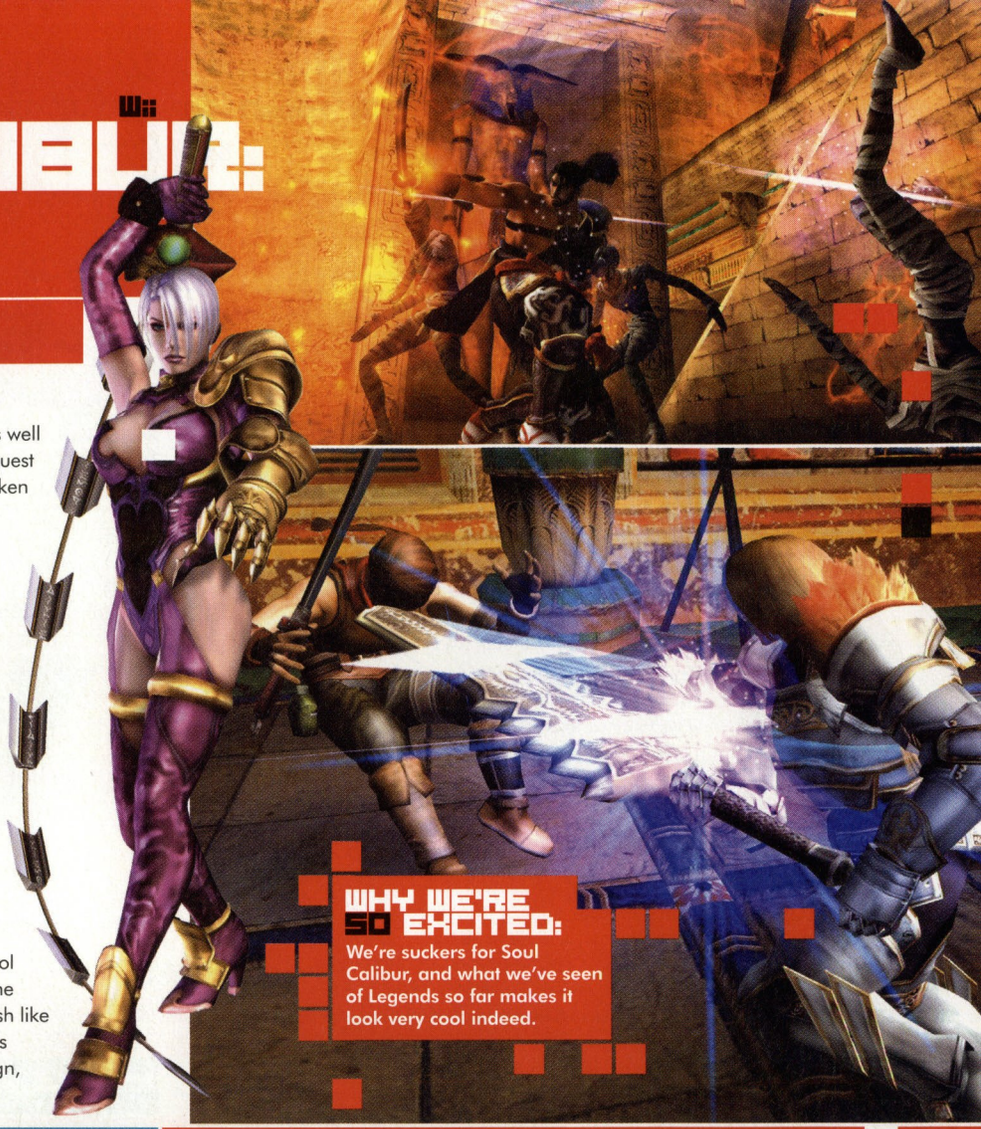
Not only that, but we've seen a very enlightening demo of how the vehicular combat will work, with BioWare showing off a few very cool-looking tank battles.



SOUL CALIBUR: LEGENDS

Wii

GENRE: **ACTION/ADVENTURE** ■ PLAYERS: **1-2**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI** ■ DUE: **LATE 2007**



It sort of goes without saying that the Wii's stock control method, the Wii remote and Nunchuk, aren't exactly suited to traditional arcade-style fighting games.

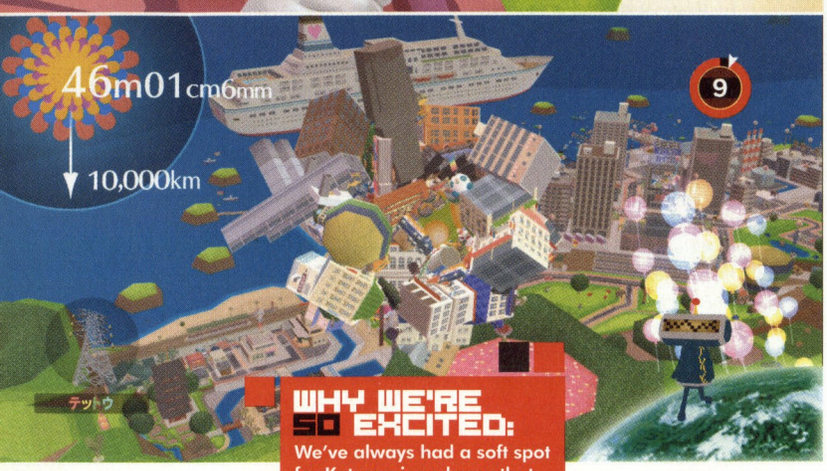
It's probably for this reason more than any other that Namco Bandai have decided not to port Soul Calibur IV to the system, and to instead release an entirely different game in the series exclusively for the Wii.

That game is Soul Calibur: Legends, and instead of facing your opponents one-on-one in a tiny arena, you will be facing hundreds throughout 12 huge levels and 40 separate quests.

Although the entire roster of playable characters have not yet been announced, Namco Bandai have revealed that you will be able to play as Mitsurugi, Ivy, Taki, Siegfried and Nightmare. You'll finally get to see what these characters get up to when they're not fighting in the Soul Calibur tournament, and will apparently get to play through each of the character's respective histories, as well as taking them on a quest to reassemble the broken shards of the cursed sword, Soul Edge.

The Wii control system will probably make or break Soul Calibur: Legends, but so far it looks as though Namco Bandai are off to a good start. The game will utilise both the Wiimote and nunchuk in a configuration that will probably resemble Zelda: Twilight Princess, with the nunchuk used to control your character while the Wiimote is used to slash like a sword. As long as it's better than Urban Reign, we'll be happy.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
We're suckers for Soul Calibur, and what we've seen of Legends so far makes it look very cool indeed.



BEAUTIFUL KATAMARI

X360

GENRE: **RPG** ■ PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI** ■ DUE: **OCTOBER 2007**

A game that has caused no end of controversy is the next in the Katamari Damacy series, Beautiful Katamari. When it was first announced in April of this year it was slated to appear on both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, however, Namco Bandai scrapped the PS3 version of the game only a few months later.

The now-exclusive Xbox 360 game isn't looking phased by the cancellation, however, and in fact, it looks just as beautiful as its title would have you believe.

Although the visuals have essentially the same simplistic design, Katamari is of course running for the first time in HD, with the colourful world of the Prince of All Cosmos coming to life in vibrant 720p.

There is also a lot more to collect this time around, since The King of All Cosmos has once again caused a disaster, this time a black hole, which has sucked up entire solar systems. The only solution is for you to roll everything in sight into a giant ball and send it into space, and using the power of a next gen system, Beautiful Katamari manages to create larger balls of random junk than ever before.

Also included will be online and offline multiplayer, including a four player versus mode where you and three rivals compete to see who can collect the largest Katamari ball.

It doesn't sound like Namco Bandai are messing to much with the Katamari formula, but with new levels, new game modes, online features and some spruced up visuals, Katamari is quite a coup as an Xbox 360 exclusive.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
We've always had a soft spot for Katamari, and now that it's beautiful, we're even more keen.

PS3

LITTLEBIGPLANET

GENRE: **COMMUNITY-BASED PLATFORMER** ■ PLAYERS: **1-4**
DEVELOPER: **MEDIA MOLECULE** ■ DUE: **TBA**

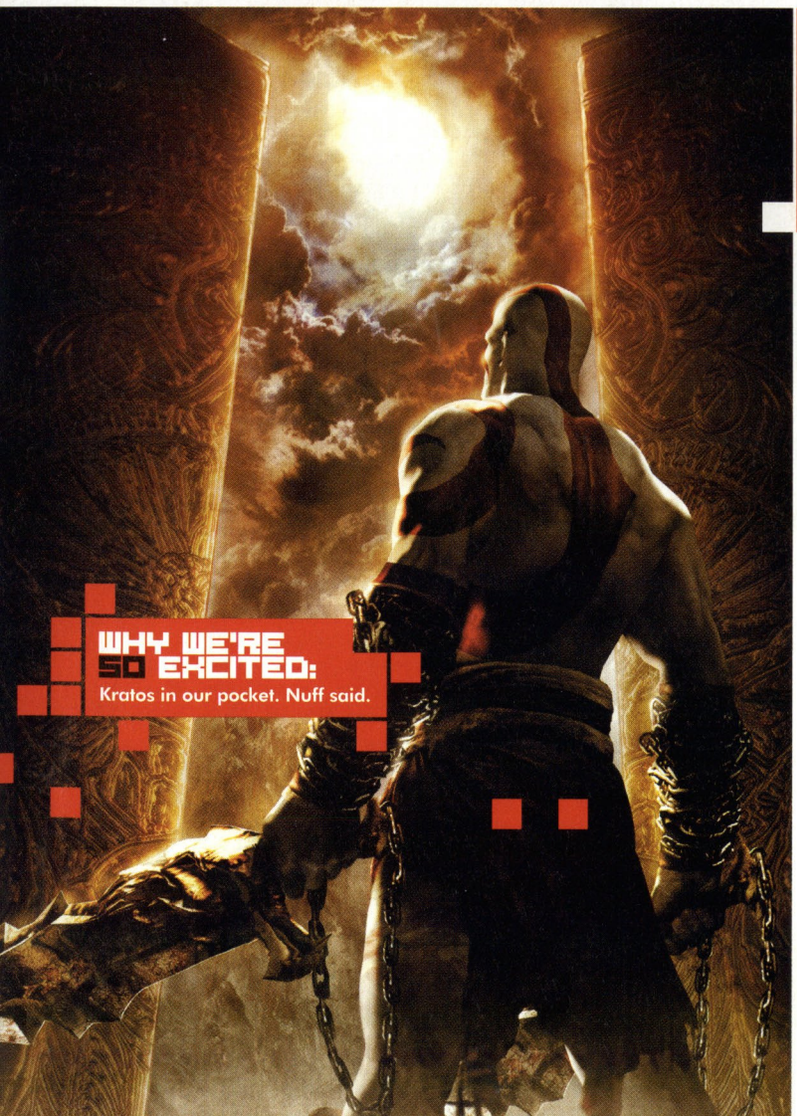
LittleBigPlanet is without doubt the most intriguing game so far for the PlayStation 3 network. Billed as being a community-based game, LittleBigPlanet allows you to build your own platform game levels from scratch, distribute them via the PS3 network, and finally, play with them along with three friends either online or offline.

You control a little rag doll-type guy who you can completely customised to wear, for example, an Evel Knievel-style daredevil suit (with cape and helmet), a traditional Japanese kimono, a dragon mask, or just a t-shirt, along with plenty of other combinations. By bringing up a pop-up menu your ragdoll character can easily select a variety of background and foreground objects to place into your level, creating obstacles and puzzles, all of which use some extremely cool physics calculations, so they act and react like real objects.

This of course leads to all sorts of hilarity once the actual playing begins, but even then the creating isn't finished, since you can co-operatively design a level with more than one person, making LittleBigPlanet pretty much the most creative multiplayer game we've ever seen.

Since E3, Media Molecule have announced that they will be supporting LittleBigPlanet heavily with downloadable content, including new items and tools, which means that the level of creativity will really only be limited by your imagination.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
The ability to make your own game levels and share it with the interwebs? Sign us up!



WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
Kratos in our pocket. Nuff said.

PSP

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

GENRE: **ACTION** ■ PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **READY AT DAWN** ■ DUE: **DECEMBER 2007**

Honestly, is there a single PSP owner that isn't looking forward to God of War: Chains of Olympus? We didn't think so.

As it stands the latest in the Greek mythology-steeped action series is probably the most anticipated game for Sony's handheld since Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories came and went over a year ago, and with good reason too, since developer Ready at Dawn (the same team behind the cracking Daxter game on PSP) are working hard to make this sequel every bit as good as its predecessors.

The story of Chains of Olympus is set before the events of the original God of War, and is a prequel of sorts. The game will chart the ten years that Kratos served under the Gods of Olympus, leading him on an adventure that sees him conquering "lands that no mortal has ever walked on" and fighting the most feared creatures from Greek mythology.

The entire game has been customised from the ground up for the PSP, and will include all new environments including the gates of Hades and the depths of Tartarus, among others.

Kratos and his enemies do look a little blockier after the change of platform, but only very slightly, with everything looking pretty amazing, especially the boss battles.

One such beast was shown by Ready at Dawn at E3, in a very impressive sequence. In the battle Kratos begins fighting off a boss who looks pretty damn big at about three times Kratos's height and width, only to have another boss ten times the size come along and eat the boss Kratos had started fighting, proving that even on the PSP, God of War will be a big experience.

ZACK + WIKI: QUEST FOR BARBAROS TREASURE

Wii

GENRE: **ADVENTURE** ■ PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM** ■ DUE: **LATE 2007**

Formerly known as "Project Treasure Island", Zack and Wiki: Quest for Barbaros Treasure is a point-and-click adventure, Japanese style.

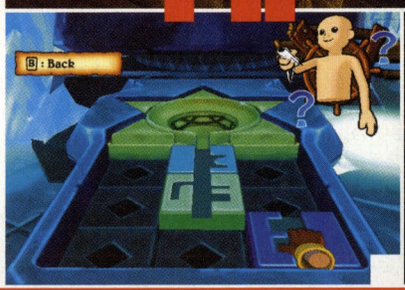
Focusing on the exploits of an apprentice pirate (Zack) and his pet, a mutant monkey/bear/dog hybrid who can fly by whirling his tail like a helicopter rotor (that would be Wiki), this game sees you solving puzzles for fun and profit in a quest to find the hidden treasure of Barbaro, a master pirate.

Instead of using just a simple cursor interface, Zack and Wiki instead utilises the Wii remote's pointer to interact with the world around you, while to solve many puzzles you'll have to use the Wii remote as if it was a saw, use it like a lever to pull switches, turn it like a handle to open doors, and even hold it up to your lips to play it like a piccolo.

The puzzles will apparently increase greatly in difficulty as the game progresses, and although it looks pretty cutesy, Capcom have been adamant in saying that this is an intellectual game that requires plenty of smarts to play, making it not just for the kiddies.

Zack and Wiki is interesting purely for the fact that it may be the first to bring point-and-click back to a major home console. The Nintnedo DS has so far managed to revive the genre nicely with games like Hotel Dusk and Phoenix Wright, and we'd love to see the same revitalisation come to Wii.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
We're just interested to see how a point-and-click game works on the Wii.



WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
A game with a new and interesting setting, beautiful graphics, a murder mystery plotline that involves dimensional travel and a decent use of the Sixaxis – what's not to be excited about?

FOLKLORE

PS3

GENRE: **ADVENTURE/RPG** ■ PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **GAME REPUBLIC** ■ DUE: **NOVEMBER 2007**

All too often RPGs find themselves falling into remarkably set patterns – you've got the Tolkienesque high fantasy worlds or games like LotR Online (obviously), the Gothic Series, The Elder Scrolls, Two Worlds and the like, the techno-fantasy world of the modern FF series, post-apocalyptic wastelands and so on. Folklore is something different. Sure it's an RPG with a fantasy setting but instead of the familiar fantasy tropes we know from games and books, Folklore, as the name suggests, draws its mythology directly from real world, Western folklore and fable. For the most part anyway. Straddling the divide between murder mystery and RPG, Folklore will see players taking the role of two characters, Ellen, a young woman drawn to a town called Doolin by a letter supposedly sent by her (once again supposedly) dead mother and Keats, a journalist for an occult magazine drawn to Doolin by reports of a girl being chased by fairies. During their adventures, both Ellen and Keats will travel between Earth and seven other realms, including the Fairy Realm and the Netherworld.

Rather than sticking to common RPG combat styles, Folklore takes a different path by basing combat around Ellen and Keats' ability to draw the soul from creatures and use those souls as weapons. Although we haven't had a chance to get our hands on the code as yet, this combat system definitely sounds interesting to us, as does the fact that it uses the Sixaxis controller. Yes, many other games use the Sixaxis motion control but all the experience we've had so far feels superfluous. The reports so far seem to indicate that the motion controlled combat not only feels intuitive but good as well. We can't wait to try for ourselves.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

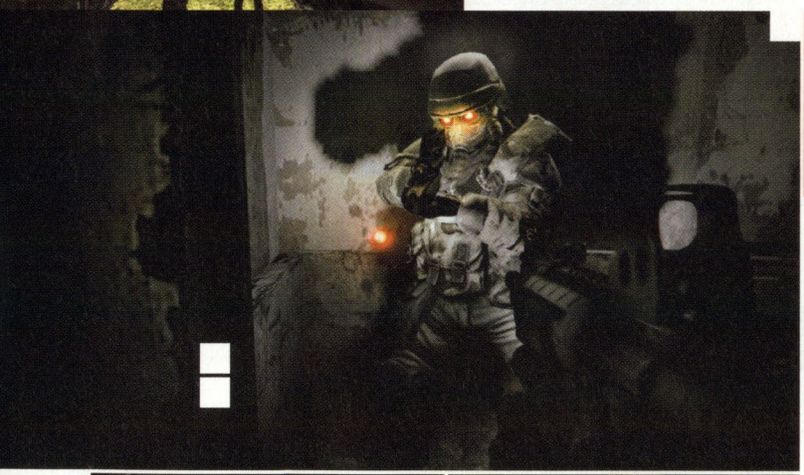
PC/X360

GENRE: **RTS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-16**
DEVELOPER: **MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT** ■ DUE: **SEPTEMBER 2007**

Before getting out eyes and paws on World in Conflict we wouldn't have thought of swooning over the look of an RTS. Yeah, sure, there have been some nice looking RTS games in the past but there really haven't been that many that have stuck in memory as being truly beautiful. Maybe it's because of the scale of RTS games – it's hard to make something so big as detailed as something that is more closely focussed as far as level design goes. Maybe it's because traditionally RTS games have been far more concerned with troop balance than being able to see the looks of shock on an individual soldier's face when he gets shot. We're not sure but that perception is about to chance, World in Conflict is a beautiful looking game, and we don't just mean by RTS standards. We mean by any standards it's incredible to look at. It's one of the best looking games we've seen in a long time.

Being pretty doesn't mean much if the balance isn't there and we're happy to report that WiC is shaping up to be pretty damn sexy on the gameplay side as well. Set in an alternate present in which a desperate Soviet Union invades the United States, WiC switches things up from the typical RTS by concentrating on small unit tactics and does away with resource gathering altogether, in favour of a system of constantly replenishing "Command Points" that can be spent to buy reinforcements, air-strikes, artillery and the like. The beta is underway at the moment – we'll bring you a more detailed hands on next issue.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
No resource gathering, looks beautiful and has Tears for Fears on the soundtrack.



KILLZONE 2

PS3

GENRE: **FPS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **GUERRILLA** ■ DUE: **LATE 2007**

Killzone 2 has been a name at the tips of tongues before due to its (definitely not pre-rendered and trying to pass itself off as gameplay footage in order to make the 360 look like an inferior machine) first trailer, but now that we have actually seen it in action, Killzone 2 is looking like a far more interesting and dare we say, exciting than we would like to admit. In all honesty there has been nothing shown so far that we haven't seen before in a FPS but what he have seen has been so polished it makes us want to see more. It's kind of like God of War in respect – everything in that game we'd seen before but the seamless integration of all the elements and the way they played together was what made it so special rather than breaking any particularly new ground.

Whilst the graphics don't look as good as the infamous 2005 trailer they do look damn good, detailing a wonderfully bleak and war-torn battlefield populated with our favourite Nazi-looking non-Nazi enemies, the Helghast. Physics integration is seamless and understated with some of the most realistic interactions we've seen in a FPS. If a grenade goes off next to a barrel or crate, expect to see them damaged or torn apart rather than thrown around like toys. What's more, the Helghast will react not only to where they are shot but what they are being shot with as well; hit one in the face with a low powered weapon and they may clutch the wound but continue fighting, shoot one in the leg with a shotgun and it may fall bleeding, wing it with an AP bullet and it might soldier on.

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
Sony are pitting so much on Killzone 2 and keeping so secret that we're sure there must be something interesting up their collective sleeves.

HELLGATE: LONDON

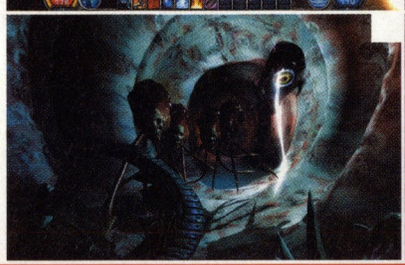
PC

GENRE: **ACTION RPG** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **FLAGSHIP STUDIOS** ■ DUE: **OCTOBER 2007**

WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
It may not be Diablo III but it's the next best thing.

All you really have to say about Hellgate: London to sum up why it is so exciting is the fact that the game is the newest action RPG by the core developers of a little game called Diablo, but there's a whole lot more to be excited about besides. For a start there's the setting – a futuristic London controlled by demonic forces, leaving the survivors to take shelter in the Underground, there's the huge variety of character options, the customisation, the fact that the game can be played in first and third person views, the beautiful design, the randomly generated maps and encounters, the epic single player quest, the 200 odd side quests, the incredibly rare and random "chance" quests and the fact that the game will not only be single player but will also feature a massively multiplayer online element (for a fee of course). There are probably some more things to get excited about but that's one hell of a long run-on sentence and we didn't want to turn Hyper into a novel by James Joyce.

As far as the online multiplayer is concerned, so far we know that players will be able to play online for free (kind of like Diablo II) but for US$9.95 a month players will have access to a more detailed multiplayer game complete with an auction house, raids, PVP and regular content updates. We can't wait to get our hands on final code.



WHY WE'RE SO EXCITED:
Big, beautiful, player freedom, alien invasions and North Koreans.

CRYSIS

PC

GENRE: **FPS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **CRYTEK** ■ DUE: **LATE 2007**

Far Cry was a game that got tongues wagging. Not only was the CryEngine a beautiful base for the game, the free-roaming, go anywhere approach to the story really gave the game an excellent sense of freedom. This pedigree is one of the reasons why Crysis is such a hotly anticipated game but if you look at the shooter as an independent entity it's still just as exciting for many reasons. For a start the CryEngine 2 is quite something to behold, a GPU meltingly powerful graphics engine capable of pumping out some of the most amazing graphics we've yet seen on any system. The plot, revolving around an alien invasion, international diplomatic crisis and a once tropical island that has been frozen by the alien invaders sounds like a doozy. Even better, Crysis boasts a huge amount of gameplay customisation. The main character wears a nanotechnology suit capable of increasing the user's speed, strength, weapon skills, cloak them or shield them, the catch being that you can't do everything at once. Instead players will be able to change the designation of their suit on the fly enabling them to tailor the mechanics to the way they wish to approach the game in any given situation, so you could sneak into an enemy compound under a cloak to achieve your objective if you want to use stealth or you could whack on a shield and run and gun the same mission. The choice is up to the player. This level of customisation will also extend to the weapons. The developer has stated that, with the exception of one weapon (we're thinking it will be some kind of alien BFG), each weapon will have between 3 and 5 modifications, ranging from simple scopes through to customised ammunition and even more exotic parts. Now all we need is a PC that will run the game.

TAME YOUR FEROCIOUS HUNGER
KRAFT
EASY MAC
4 Pack
KRAFT
EASY MAC
Cheese
Microwaveable Macaroni & Cheese Snack

Penny Arcade Adventures:

ON THE RAIN-SLICK PRECIPICE OF DARKNESS

SYSTEM: **PC, MAC**
CATEGORY: **ADVENTURE/RPG**
PLAYERS: **1** / DEVELOPER: **HOTHEAD GAME**
DUE: **TBA**

» **Maurice Branscombe**

Almost a decade ago, web comics changed for the better. With Penny Arcade's 1998 entrance onto the superhighway-esque contraption that is the Internet, the gaming community had finally found a pair of comic strip characters that they could identify with.

Created by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins, Penny Arcade follows the misadventures of their two alter-egos Jonathan "Gabe" Gabriel and Tycho "Tycho" Brahe, whom, since their inception, have been poking fun at games industry from the comfort of their living room couch.

From the horrors of playing Daikatana, right through to the stupidity of people who break their TVs with a flying Wiimote, every gaming headline of the past nine years has been countered by a three-panel parody, packed with referential humour, profanity and the occasional explosion of violence, and then sent out into the world three times a week.

Over the years Penny Arcade has become one of the world wide web's most popular comics, with a reported two million readers visiting www.penny-arcade.com every single day to get their fix of gaming commentary in comic form. It has proven so popular that it's even getting its own game, with the impossibly long title of Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness.

We sat down with co-creator Mike Krahulik and the game's Producer, Joel De Young from Hothead Games, to find out exactly what Gabe and Tycho have gotten themselves into this time.

STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS

"We're gamers, and like any gamer, making our own game has always been a dream." Says Mike Krahulik, Penny Arcade's illustrator and the real-life alter ego of the Pac-Man-shirted, cardboard-tube-wielding member of the Penny Arcade duo, Gabe.

"When the opportunity to work with Hothead came up we couldn't pass on it." But how exactly did the opportunity for the Penny Arcade crew to get their own game come about? According to Joel De Young, it was a combination of knowing the right people and the collaborative structure of Hothead Games.

"We have been fans of Penny Arcade for a long time and a few people at Hothead knew the guys personally," says De Young, "[but] the real reason we hooked up to make a game with them is because our production model allows for a true collaborative co-development. [Mike and Jerry] are working directly on the game's content which is a level of involvement that is both important to them personally, and also critical to the game's success."

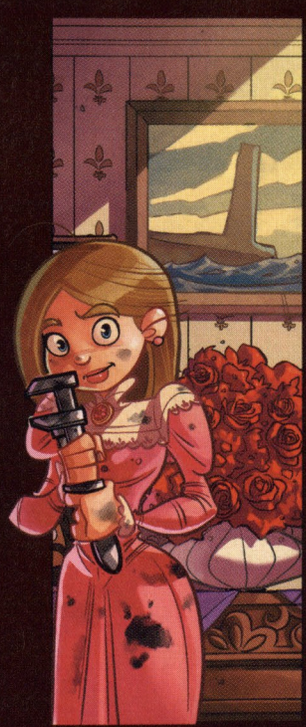
"I hope you can see this, because I'm doing it as hard as I can"

» "We're gamers, and like any gamer, making our own game has always been a dream."

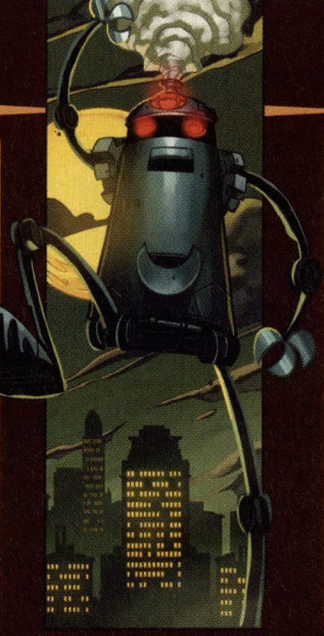
If there's one thing we can say about the collaborative partnership between Hothead Games and the Penny Arcade team it's that together they already seem to have mined the depths of their collective cranial cavities to extract some intriguing, if not downright bizarre, ideas for the forthcoming Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness.

The setting and premise for the game, for example, are something that Penny Arcade fans are not likely to have ever seen before, or expected.

"The setting for the game is a sort of 1920's fantasy city called New Arcadia." Explains Krahulik. "We've got a lot of steampunk style elements in the game like clockwork robots and steam-driven tech. There's also a lot of classic horror elements like ancient evil Gods and dark magic. We mix all that together and toss the player into an adventure along with



Tycho deals with a breakout from the old folks home



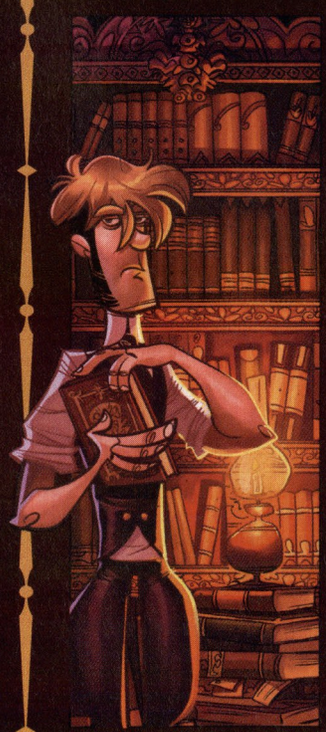
2D VERSUS 3D

One of the more interesting features of On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness is that it will be the first time Gabe and Tycho have been seen in three dimensions.

While the game's 3D visuals won't make your eyeballs bleed for all their cutting-edged gorgeousness, but they do look suited to the comic's style, and have enough character to convey the humour and mirth that the Penny Arcade duo are famous for.

Also included in the game will be 2D animated cut scenes, hand-drawn by Mike Krahulik in the traditional style of the comic, giving players the best of both worlds.

We're glad to see that "emo fringe" is included.



Gabe and Tycho who in this world are private investigators."

"Think steampunk meets H.P. Lovecraft." Adds Joel De Young.

When quizzed on why they decided to make an adventure/RPG game based in an entirely new steampunk setting, rather than something more recognisable to readers of the comic, for example, a cardboard-tube samurai game, both Krahulik and De Young agree that they wanted On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness to deliver something completely new to Penny Arcade fans.

"It's just something we haven't done yet with the characters and that's what was exciting for us." Says Krahulik. "It's still full of Penny Arcade humor and you will definitely see parodies of other games and genres in there. The 1920's horror/steampunk thing was just something that sounded really fun and as we started thinking about it more we saw all these cool ways to fit other PA characters like Annarchy and Fruit F*cker into the world.

"This is something that is being made for the Penny Arcade fan." Agrees Joel De Young. "Mike and Jerry picked a genre and a setting that they knew would resonate with their audience. Plus adventure games are really the best way to tell a story, so it's a natural fit for a Penny Arcade game."

COMIC ADVENTURE

Now that you know the setting and premise, you may well ask exactly what Mike, Jerry and Hothead Games have in store for you in the gameplay department.

"We're calling the game a comic adventure." Explains Krahulik. "As far as the actual game play, it's very reminiscent of classic RPG's. We've got turn-based combat and a few other things that should feel familiar to anyone that's ever played a Final Fantasy game. In addition to that we've got a ton of classic adventure game style play. You'll be interacting with a bunch of different characters and managing branching dialogue trees. I think we've got a really fun sort of hybrid going."

It seems that you won't be controlling either Gabe or Tycho throughout your Penny Arcade Adventure either. You will instead control a character of your own making, as one of the game's features is a create-a-character mode. With this toolkit you'll be able to sculpt your own likeness into the Penny Arcade universe, modelling their appearance and clothing to your tastes.

It seems then that Gabe, Tycho, Annarchy (Tycho's neice) and Fruit F*cker (a sentient, robotic fruit-juicing machine who has an insatiable lust for getting down and dirty with oranges, grapefruits and other citrus fruits) and any other playable characters from the PA universe will be characters who will join your Final Fantasy-style battle party, with your toolkit-created Frankenstein being the leader.

Another difference is that On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness will be delivered episodically, with regular updates being made available for download every couple of months.

"The fact that we're delivering this adventure episodically is something that not too many game companies are doing right now." Says Joel De Young. "It will let players get new instalments of the story every few months, and will help us adjust the game based on player feedback."

"It's definitely not about taking a larger game and simply chopping it up." Assures De Young. "We're telling a larger story over the entire series of episodes, but each episode will stand on its own as well... I'd say a typical playthrough of Episode 1 will be around 8 hours. That's our current estimate, though I may have to eat my words when we start timing it out during beta [laughs]."

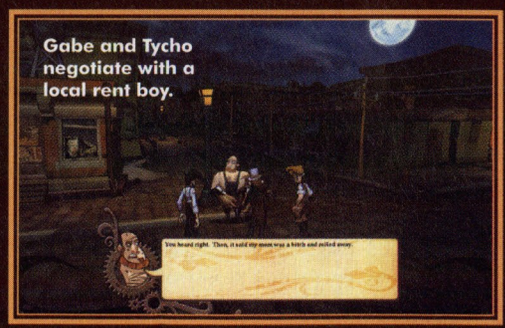
RON GILBERT STYLE

Possibly the greatest coup of On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness's development is that Mike, Jerry and Hothead Games have managed to get veteran game designer Ron Gilbert on board to help with the designing duties. As the creator of Lucasart's SCUMM scripting language and the brains behind such adventure classics as Maniac Mansion, and most notably the Monkey Island series, Gilbert is more than qualified to advise on the design of an adventure game. According to both Mike Krahulik and Joel De Young, he's given them untold inspiration for the design of their game, as well as giving them a crash course in pre-visualisation techniques.

"Ron is legend." Begins Krahulik. "He actually contacted Hothead after hearing about the game and was interested in helping us."

"We had laid out a very linear

"If the game sucks, the first place you'll hear about it is on Penny Arcade."



Gabe and Tycho negotiate with a local rent boy.

experience." Explains Krahulik. "[When Ron saw our designs he] jumped up and started drawing all these crazy charts and maps on our whiteboard. He taught us a method of visualising the flow of the game before we had anything to actually play. Once we could do that he showed us how to maintain a strong narrative but give the player freedom to move through it in different ways. It was really eye opening."

"It's totally awesome working with Ron." Agrees Joel De Young. "Many of us at Hothead grew up on the old LucasArts adventure games, so having his input on our adventure gameplay is really invaluable. Having him involved means that people will play our game and get a sense of being in one of those classic adventures. We think it will be a huge nostalgia factor for a lot of people."

While we did contact Gilbert himself to contribute to this article, he was unavailable for comment. Nevertheless, we're certain that his involvement with On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness will be a positive thing for the game, something that Penny Arcade's Mike Krahulik agrees with.

"I think that [Ron's involvement is] going to hopefully make for a much better game experience." Says Krahulik. "Jerry and I can make

funny comics but we've never made a game before. Having a pro like Ron around can only help."

RAIN-SLICK GOODNESS

As any reader of Penny Arcade will tell you, when Mike and Jerry write about a game they've played that didn't live up to their expectations, they don't hold back.

Their caustic parodies of games like Spider-Man 3 (where they instruct anyone who bought the game not to panic, and to "simply lie down, and wait to die") have delighted readers and irked game publishers for as long as they've been doing them.

Now that Penny Arcade themselves are entering into the industry that they have for so long commented on and criticised from the sidelines, what will happen if On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness isn't any fun?

"Mike and Jerry seem keenly aware that their game will be scrutinised pretty hard. " Laughs Joel De Young. "What it means for us is that we're primarily focused on making sure the game feels authentically Penny Arcade, and that at its core the gameplay is fun. The guys at Penny Arcade really take quality seriously in all they do, so I'm confident this game is going to be something that pleases PA fans and non-fans alike."

If the game doesn't please, however, will Gabe and Tycho be forced to tell anyone who plays Penny Arcade Adventures to "simply lie down, and wait to die"?

"We've always said that if the game sucks, the first place you'll hear about it is on Penny Arcade." Reassures Krahulik. "We're trying this new thing and we're working with some really talented people and I think it will probably turn out cool. If it doesn't though we're not going to try and lie to people. If we get finished and it blows we'll tell you."

So far Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness seems to be headed in the right direction though, and with the talented people at Hothead Games working alongside the likes of Mike, Jerry and Ron Gilbert, this game is bound to deliver not only the humour that Penny Arcade is known for, but also some pretty special adventuring/RPG gameplay to go along with it. <<

Penny Arcade Origins

So, we know that Penny Arcade is one of the most popular Intertron funny pages on the planet on which we live, but how did it all begin?

It seems that Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins' alter egos, Gabe and Tycho came to be amid that most potent of artistic stimuli – rejection.

"Jerry and I entered a contest in [the now defunct] Next Generation magazine. They were looking for a comic strip about games to run in their mag." Recalls Krahulik.

"We didn't win the contest but we had all these cool comics, so we sent them out to a bunch of different gaming sites that were popular at the time. Loonygames.com ended up running them and they were pretty popular. Eventually we left Loonygames for our own site and kicked it up to three comics a week."

"I really don't know [how Penny Arcade became so popular.]" Admits Krahulik. "If I had to guess I'd say that for whatever reason there are a lot of gamers out there that can relate to Gabe and Tycho."

"All we do is try and make a funny comic. If we start worrying about why it's a hit or what we need to do to maintain it we'll go nuts."

Beowulf

SYSTEM: **XBOX 360, PS3**
CATEGORY: **ACTION**
PLAYERS: **1** / DEVELOPER: **TIWAK**
DUE: **NOVEMBER**

It's not too often that we find ourselves enthusing over a movie license game. Usually a movie license simply means playing through the actions of the movie and then usually in the most straightforward "casual gamer" way possible. At a recent Ubisoft event we had the chance to see code for their upcoming game Beowulf, based on the Robert Zemeckis animated film of the same name, itself based on the oldest surviving epic poem written in old English.

From what we saw, Beowulf is no normal film license. Instead of aiming towards a casual audience, Beowulf looks set to be a game made for gamers, containing elements of visceral combat, small unit tactics and movement puzzles, all wrapped up in an epic story that follows the plot of the film but also adds to it by featuring events glossed over in the poem.

We had a chance to have a chat with **Adrian Lacey**, the Game Manager for Beowulf to talk about the game and what's it's like working with a movie license.

How else are you supposed to dry a giant red bedsheet?

» "We were fortunate to meet with Robert Zemeckis and get his vision on the poem..."

How did the Tiwak studio become involved with the movie license?

We had finished GRAW and the core team started looking at new projects, one of which was Beowulf. We had received some early visuals and some information from Paramount and started researching some basic ideas. The story itself and the idea of adapting the story of this warrior king fit very well with the type of game we wanted to create. So after the initial discussion with film makers and the various studios Beowulf was underway!

How closely are you working with the film team?

The filmmakers (ImageMovers) and Paramount have been very helpful throughout the development of the game. From the initial concept stages, we were fortunate to meet with Robert Zemeckis and Steve Starkey and get their original vision and modern take on the world's oldest, epic, English-language poem.

We've also had the chance to work with Anthony Hopkins, Sebastien Roche, Ray Winstone and Brenden Gleeson, who accepted to do the voice-acting. Their profound knowledge of their movie roles and talent truly adds an amazing dimension for the player. We have invested heavily in sound design and have done our best to make the most of their participation, which definitely contributes to the overall quality of the players' journey.

How closely does the game follow the events of the movie?

We adapted the movie story to a hard-core gaming format that goes beyond the typical linear approach to a movie-license and makes the two experiences complementary. While we have kept all of the essential story elements, we have created a few ellipses in order to let the player drive the epic experience and allow him to see the movie with fresh eyes. We also concentrate our core gameplay during the 30 year-period that is not explicitly explored in either the film or the poem, wherein Beowulf is a young warrior and then, abruptly, an aging king. This gives the player an extended universe in which he writes his own story and defines his own legacy as Beowulf.

Are you using assets from the Zemeckis film such as sound/voice samples or are you recording your own dialogue/mocap, etc?

The film-makers have been incredibly supportive and granted us access to pretty much every asset we could ask for. That includes the movie script and script revisions, movie 3d models, tons of concept art and above all, access to the creative minds behind the project.

That helped a lot understanding their creative vision, an absolute pre-requisite before we could start designing the game's core mechanics. That being said, the game's much more combat and action oriented; similarly, our 10+ hour storyline encompasses massive amount of extra original content and extra dialogs. Thus, all those elements had to be produced from scratch while still keeping in mind the movie's artistic direction.

So we've mainly used all the movie assets as references, guidelines, from which we produced our specific animations as well as our in-game dialogs.

How has working within the constraints of a movie license impacted the development of the game (outside of the story)?

Working on such a project is by definition much more constraining than developing your own original title. Primarily because you're adapting someone's vision into a game and you have to respect that vision.

On this particular project though, I feel like we have still pushed the limits further in terms of collaboration with our partners ImageMovers and Paramount. As Gilles Matouba explains it, since the start Tiwak's intent was to do "all but a straightforward, linear

Superman's fortress of solitude, before the renovations

"Row, row, row your boat, gently down the – come on men, join in!"

adaptation of Zemeckis' movie". The main challenge has been for the team here to fully understand the film-makers' vision before we could start designing the game core mechanics.

The license has been considered as a solid framework, from which we tried to be as faithful as possible and from which we could build our own elements. The game is very much an extension of the movie experience. It builds on the same themes but offers additional content.

From what we understand, another game company is currently developing a game based around the legend of Beowulf. Does this

"Sup ladies, you know I'm old England's most eligible bachelor..."

[above] Beowulf shows off his sweet new snowboard

Beowulf
continued...

concern you in any way?

Beowulf is the oldest surviving epic poem written in old English. So they can develop a game based on the legend or story if they wish to. The various adaptations released to date or, to be released in the future, show how truly inspiring this story is. A genuine classic, that throughout the ages has inspired Tolkien's Lord of The Rings saga and Wagner's The Ring of Niebelung. We are very much inspired by the visual feel and script of Robert Zemeckis' Beowulf and we are on 360 and PS3!

We understand that Beowulf will utilise the powerful Yeti engine previously seen in GRAW. What are the biggest changes to the engine you have made for Beowulf?

With an additional year of development since GRAW2, Yeti now supports new exclusive graphical innovations for Beowulf. Among them the most visually and technically impressive are the Animated Fur, the Procedural Cloth and the Dynamic Post-FX.

The Procedural Cloth feature enables all in-game soft bodies such as clothes, hair, and flags to dynamically interact with the environment and elements such as gravity, wind and water. Therefore, they will get heavier when wet, they'll be floating in water and hair will move accordingly to the character's motion and the wind's conditions. If Beowulf goes through a pool of blood, his trousers will be soaked and stained too.

Similarly the dev team also designed and implemented realistic and dynamically animated fur in the engine. The creation of the fur is now automatic, and it's fully editable with more than 20 parameters. It adds a lot to the sense of realism and the overall immersion when you play the game.

Last but not least, the dynamic post FX, perhaps the most stunning visually, includes all kinds of dynamic blurs (motion blur, zoom blur), editable depth of field and color remap. Tiwak's artists have now full access and control to a vast range of cinematographic effects that really define the visual style of the game and make it a truly cinematographic experience.

From what we've seen, Beowulf will feature both intense combat and movement puzzles, can you elaborate

This dining scene doesn't have nearly enough Mead!

Ye olde English swing set.

"Just don't ask me how I got this one overdeveloped arm, okay guys..."

on the combat and movement abilities available to players.

The combat system is at the core of the game. I think what makes Beowulf really innovative, is its tactical layer. It's all about how the player reads the battlefields, spots his available options and decides which way he wants to tackle each situation.

The Thanes are a big part of this tactical system, but rest assure that the player as Beowulf will do the big part of the fighting using grabs, weapons or hand-to-hand combat. We have designed 100 different weapons and more than 2500 animations, we're confident that there'll be a vast range of options available to finish off any of your enemies.

AI is a key element in combat; and one of the main focuses has been to improve the AI module of the Yeti engine, the platform that powers Beowulf to deliver truly adaptative NPC behavior.

Enemies for instance will develop strategies according to your combat style. This forces the player to constantly adapt and improvise, to pick up a new weapon – or better steal it from your enemy – dodge a strike and then counter-attack. The more tactically you fight the more you are efficient, scoring extra damages.

As you progress, enemies will tend to have more efficient group strategies, they'll try to corner you and separate you from your thanes. If you try to run, trolls that are too slow will throw at your worshippers to get back at you.

Could you explain the "Carnal" side of Beowulf's nature and how it effects gamelay?

The Carnal side of Beowulf refers to the wild, violent and destructive inclination of the main character- his thanatos to use a psychology term. In the movie version of the legend, Beowulf's a greedy, selfish and arrogant Viking warchief who sells his soul for the promise of engraving his legend in the pantheon of heroes. And he's ready to pay the price for it.

Therefore we wanted the Carnal to be a visceral, jubilating and "easy" power that constantly tempts the player; a power that he wants to use knowing that there are potential setbacks for himself, his people and his kingdom.

Unlike the Heroic gameplay that requires a certain tactical approach, the carnal mechanics rely on 2 fundamental intentions: they have to be instinctive and based on a kind of frenzy.

Therefore, all the Carnal actions, and specifically the "grabs" are designed to best reflect that state: one single button to trigger a grab and then the sheer joy of button bashing to snap the neck of your enemy or rip his tongue out.

We understand that throughout the game players will have command over his followers, the Thanes. How are the Thanes utilised in gameplay and how does the control scheme work?

The Thanes are associated to the more tactical layer of game I mentioned earlier and that we referred to as the Heroic gameplay. It's a more challenging, a 'tough-earned' ability, which requires mastery and finesse but it generates more satisfaction in the long term.

The Heroic gameplay is basically comprised of 2 elements: the Thanes command and the Heroic combos.

The Thanes are your men that you lead in the battle. Following a simple interface using the D-pad, you can order them to regroup, hold a position, attack a position or an enemy and trigger heroic events (open drawbridge, close wheeled door). The ultimate power associated with your men is the Viking's Fury.

It requires that the player takes time in the midst of an assault to 'read' the battlefield, and spot the actions where his men will be the most efficient at.

In addition to the Thanes control, the Heroic gameplay is also based on the heroic combos. That is, more complex fighting mechanics using advanced combos, Beowulf's parry and dodge ability, and overall a good analysis of your enemies' strategies.

Overall the game's experience is comprised of these 2 parallel systems: Heroic and Carnal. Both are equally appealing, but the player's choices and actions will have repercussions on Beowulf's people and his kingdom, what we call "Beowulf's legacy".

» "Beowulf is a greedy, selfish and arrogant Viking warchief who sells his soul..."

The Legacy System simply keeps track of your actions. Play heroic with the help of your men, and you'll score Heroic points that you'll use to upgrade your men. The Legacy System is not just some gauge for XPs, it also shapes your kingdom and your people. The more you progress playing Carnal, the more your kingdom and your people will look, react in a dark-age way.

Will the final game feature any kind of multi-player?

Beowulf is at its core a single player XP, that's solely centered on the main character and his destiny.

What sets Beowulf's combat abilities apart from other action heroes?

I think what sets Beowulf the game apart from our competitors lays in its realistic approach. We're not a pure fantasy game and we don't have over-the-top finishing moves, well maybe a few, nor have we a wicked magic system. Our combat moves were designed to feel and sound real. As real as they can be when performed by a man with the strength of 30 men anyway!

What is the best reason for our readers to be excited about Beowulf?

When was the last time you cut the balls off a giant troll while leading 20 fearless Vikings against a load of psychotic barbarians? <<

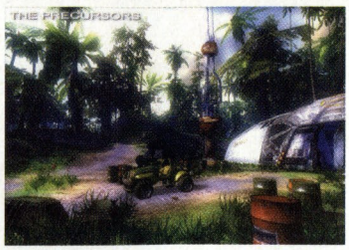
Boulder-rolling, or olde English Katamari?

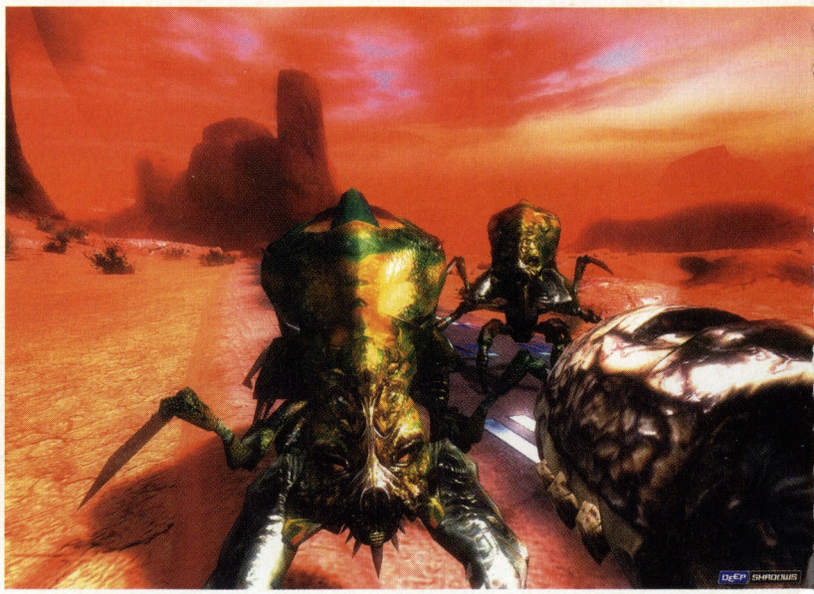
The Precursors

SYSTEM: **XBOX 360, PC**
CATEGORY: **RPG/ADVENTURE/ACTION**
PLAYERS: **1-TBA** / DEVELOPER: **DEEP SHADOWS**
DUE: **TBA**

What you're looking at here is what promises to be a real hodge-podge of a game. A blend of role-player and shooter, with a generous pinch of space sim thrown in good measure. Not to mention a cup or two of the kind of weirdness only a Russian game developer could come up with. The Precursors is an ambitious undertaking for Deep Shadows, the studio that cut their teeth on the equally promising but ultimately disappointing Boiling Point: Road to Hell. It's an undertaking that, let's face it, could result in an absolutely atrocious game if the team decide to do things half-arsed or screw up the balance of the three genres.

The Precursors is a game that's going to be all about giving you, as the player, freedom. We're told that you'll be able to choose which missions you go on, align yourself with factions and decide how you'd like to spend most of your time—either in space or on the surface of any of the ten planets—based on your personal tastes and interests. As Deep Shadows themselves so elegantly put it, you'll be allowed to "play the game you like and choose its main elements for yourself."





"Stupid bug! You go squish now!"

» The Precursors is a game that's going to be all about giving you freedom

Within reason, of course. There will be limitations there to ensure that The Precursors maintains a clear sense of direction and purpose. The Deep Shadows team explained to us that you'll be able to minimise the amount of time you spend playing the parts of the game you don't like, but there will be no way to completely ignore them.

An example. Say you find the space-based component of the game really isn't your brand of beer. You'll still have to hop into your spaceship occasionally to do some of the story missions or to move from planet to planet, but you can leave it at that. The rest of the vacuum content—the side quests and so on—can be safely ignored. There will even be a "hyper speed" function that'll let you rapidly hop about the galaxy while avoiding pirates and the various other nasties out there who'd love nothing more than to ruin your day.

In other words, The Precursors will play similar to Grand Theft Auto. You know, how San Andreas had heaps of street races to compete in if you were so inclined, but if you weren't you only had to do the few called for by the plot.

Oh and while we're on this stellar topic, we should pay mention the planets. As we said, there will be ten in all and, looking at the teaser trailer that's kicking around online, it seems like they'll be wonderfully diverse in terms of what they have to offer the intrepid intergalactic arse kicker. In those couple minutes of footage, we saw bizarre alien landscapes and desolate deserts, tropical paradises and ugly concrete jungles.

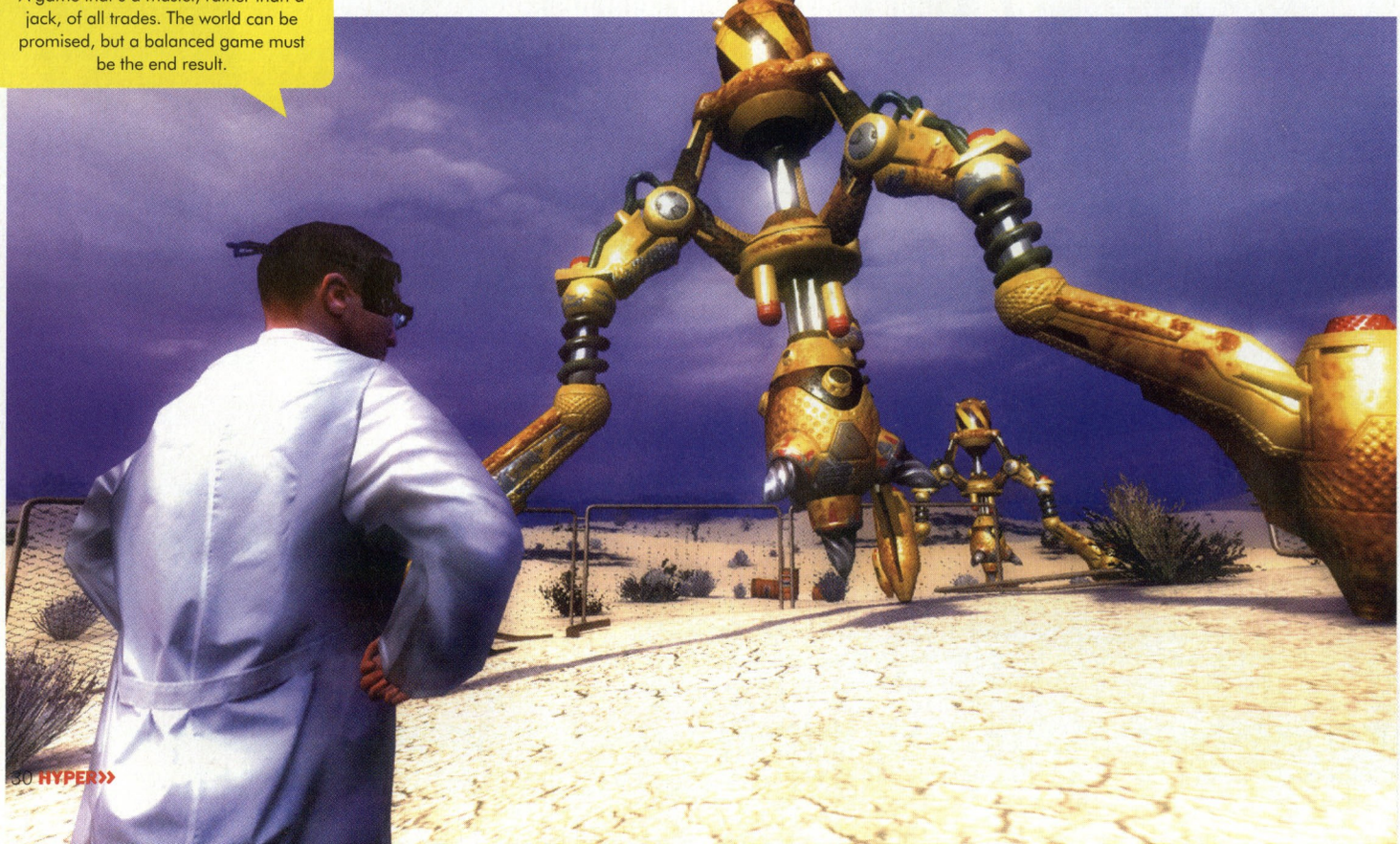
Deep Shadows promised us that these worlds, large and open as they may be, will be far from barren. There will be flora and fauna abound—from scary crocodile/shark/Komodo dragon/mutant beasts to carnivorous plants that gobble up those foolish enough to wander too close. Good thing you'll be able to destroy or, at the very least, cause considerable damage to parts of the environment, as it sounds like some Guns Limited-style deforestation will be in order.

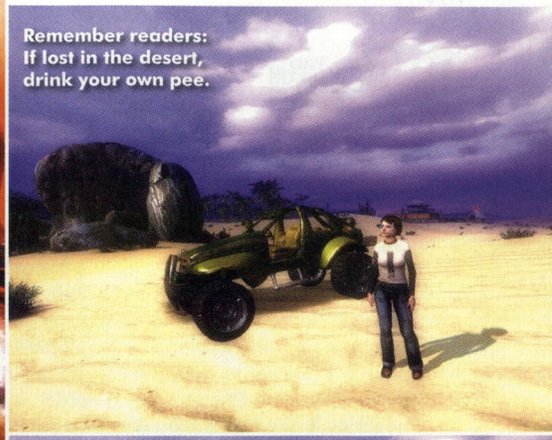
And yes, there will be intelligent life too. This will be—partly, anyway—a role-playing game, so

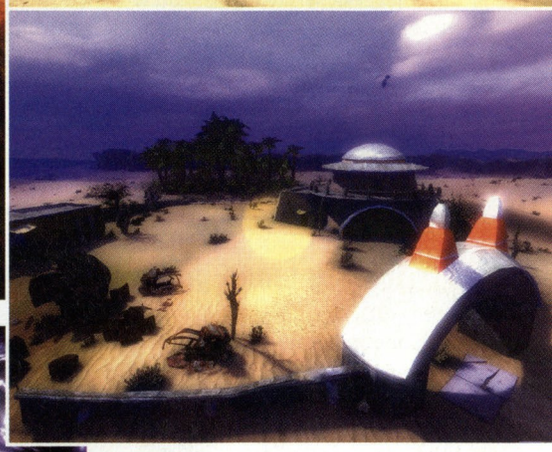
The latest in Fischer Price sandpit toys. In stores now!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A game that's a master, rather than a jack, of all trades. The world can be promised, but a balanced game must be the end result.







you'll occasionally have to take a break from shooting aliens to shoot the shit. According to Deep Shadows, non-player characters will "live their own lives and [...] share their problems with you" in the form of side quests. Occasionally, you'll be forced to co-operate with these folks in missions, so we're hoping that their intelligence is up to scratch. There will be numerous factions to piss off or align yourself with too.

You'll also find plenty of these employers—and their assignments—in space. There will be dogfights to get into and convoys to escort. Asteroids and cargo ships to plunder for minerals and other goodies. "Undesirable encounters" with random evildoers.

As much as The Precursors will have a strong shooter flavour running throughout, you won't always have to resort to violence in these "undesirable encounters." Sure, it'll be impossible to be completely non-violent in the Buddhist monk sense of the word—Deep Shadows have made that clear—but you won't need to turn into some galaxy-trotting genocidaire to finish the game.

This reminds me of that one time I did shrooms.

Of course, the team realise that pacifism probably isn't the first thing on a gamer's mind when they fire up a shooter. So, if you have a particularly strong blood lust, you'll be able to satiate it with some fifteen weapons. Note that this figure doesn't include the various weapons mounted on vehicles and turrets—just the small arms.

The arsenal sounds like it'll be interesting. You see, some of the weapons you'll use are ... alive. Living creatures that have been commandeered, for want of a better word, to be used as guns. Organic weapons are nothing new to the shooter genre—Half-Life, if you recall, had those exploding bugs and that chunky rifle thing that launched venomous flies—but the ones in The Precursors will actually require regular meals, otherwise they'll die. It's an intriguing idea. We're just concerned that it could get annoying if your weapons were too hungry, although we also feel that it'd just seem gimmicky if they were breatharians. Unfortunately, for those of you who value your e-social lives, The Precursors doesn't have a multiplayer component at this time, although Deep Shadows assures us that they're throwing around ideas. But whether the end product is online-enabled or not, make no mistake—this will be a primarily single player affair.

The Precursors has a metric arseload of potential. More, even. But, at the same time, we must force ourselves to approach it with cynicism and trepidation. After all, Boiling Point looked damn hot prior to release, but when we played in it just felt like Deep Shadows had tried to do too much. Let's hope that they've matured since then, as come next year we'd really love to slap a Game of the Year sticker on this. <<

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

Far Cry 2

SYSTEM: **PC** / CATEGORY: **FPS**
PLAYERS: **1-TBA**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT**
DUE: **TBA 2008**

A lot can happen in three years. Rock bands are formed and then embark on farewell tours. Hollywood couples tie the knot and then head to Splitsville. In the gaming arena, three years is how long it took for a game to emigrate from its tropical island home, explore a serious amount of landscape, and gain some sensible fashion sense. It's Far Cry 2, and it's poles apart from its predecessor.

The sequel sets sail to Africa, the land of surviving the savannah and gazing at gazelles, and according to creative director Clint Hocking, the change of scenery was more than necessary. "When we first went into that tropical island in *Far Cry*," he says, "we went to a place that we'd never thought we'd get to go. But now, with every game from *King Kong* to *Haze,* and even *Lost* on television, we're constantly going back to the jungle. Sure, it's fun, but it's lost that exotic feeling — it's not a place I've never been anymore. We needed to go to a place where people thought they could go, but never imagined they actually would, and for us Africa seemed to be that place."

We needed a place people never imagined they could go, for us, Africa is that place

The new setting also afforded the opportunity for a grittier, more grounded, story. Rather than putting players in another round against mutated island nasties, you're tasked with infiltrating two opposing factions vying for control of a broken government. Behind them both is a cunning weapons dealer, keeping each side well-stocked as he cackles all the way to the bank. Getting rid of him is the key to restoring order, and rather than doing so by going from Point A to Point B, you're given 50 square kilometers of free-roaming world and the ability to go where you like. With that comes the freedom to tackle missions in any order you want, from either faction you desire, in order to complete your ultimate goal.

"The game is systemic," explains producer Louis-Pierre Pharand. "There is no way a player can play the exact same game as his buddy. You can have two computers side by side, and you can make the exact same choices on each one, and it's still impossible. I've played the demo hundreds of times, and I've never played it the same way. You decide if you want to take this mission. You decide if you want to work for this faction or the other one. One of the buddy mercenaries is out there in the same situation as you — they're not siding with one faction, but they're working and dealing with both of them. You can play the game twice, three times, four times, five times, and you'll never have the same experience."

The game's many dynamic — or systemic, to use the team's buzzword — elements go towards making each session a different one. Aside from the obligatory Havok physics and ragdolling effects, enemy AI gets a serious tune-up, making it aware of its current situation and immediate surroundings. "One thing that's super-important to us is long-range behaviour," says Pharand. "That was one of the weaknesses in *Far Cry 1*, which was bigger for us because of the size of the world we have. Long range behaviour is like, if I snipe you from 450 meters away, how would you react?" Technical director Dominic Guay says that in Far Cry 2, you can expect a bigger reaction from hapless soldiers than just confusion. "We extended it," he grins. "In our game, if a guy's standing under a tree 400 meters away, you can shoot a branch and it'll fall on him. It's not necessarily what everyone's going to be doing, but for the inventive player, if that's the way they want to play it, they will

KA-BLAAAUUUUUU!!!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

With the creators of the original Far Cry, CryTek, moving on to Crysis, Far Cry 2 has some heavy competition on its hands. If it can come close to, or even match, what we're seeing come out of CryTek though, then Far Cry 2 will make us very happy indeed.

"Yep, I really am the coolest white guy in Africa"

Destroying poor villagers' homes for fun and profit!

It's like the start of The Lion King all over again...

be able to. And then what does the AI do? If it sees a truck they'll chase you, or maybe they'll snipe you back. We needed to accommodate for all those play styles."

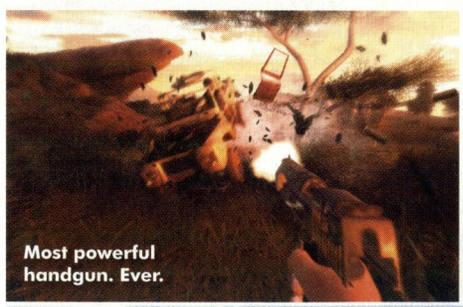
"You can play how you want," affirms Pharand." If you want to sneak in, you can. If you want to shoot from long range, get into a truck, stop at 20 meters, get into the turret and hammer away at everyone, you can."

And if you want to make an enemy mercenary wet his pants, you can. That's another trick up *Far Cry 2*'s sleeves — the ability to give baddies more emotions than just "CHAAARRRGE!" Pharand explains that "we're looking at having our AI be as realistic as possible. We want our AI to be scared. And if an enemy is close to me and I'm shooting at him — not hitting him but shooting around him — there's a good chance the guy will go nuts. There's a good chance the guy will think 'what the f***?' and get on the ground and freak out." That can escalate to causing his commanding officer to march out, attempt to shake him out of it, and upon seeing that his grunt is a useless quivering mess, shoots him point blank himself.

When you're doing the shooting, however, there's a number of things you need to be aware of beyond your ammo count. For starters, there's the condition of your gun — the longer you use it, the further it will degrade, and the greater the chances become of it locking up when you need it the most. "We've got over 30 weapons, and they're all going to have different rations of reliability," Pharand explains. "An M16 is going to jam more often than an AK. Everyone knows you can take an AK through the mud, sand, water, and it's still going to shoot. Usually guns have got different rates of fire or whatever, but we're adding this on top, so the player might have a gun that fires really well, but it jams really easy." There's also a revamped health system (no medpacks, just a one-button press that performs a contextual healing action), realistic destruction ("anything that looks like it should be breakable is breakable", says Guay), and even a dynamic weather system that the team is looking to have reflect your situation (sunshine and lollypops for when you're owning, storm clouds and gloomy skies for when you're in a bind).

The team sees it as a big project, not only in terms of its technical scope, but also in the themes it's exploring. As Hocking explains, "*Far Cry 2* is a game that's going to ask you a question: in a war-torn world, how far will you go to do the right thing?" We're not sure, but we're willing to go a fair way to play it.

DARREN WELLS



Most powerful handgun. Ever.

SHOOT YOUR BEST FRIEND?

It could have easily been another rollercoaster game of kill-kill-kill, but the team wanted to instill deeper themes in Far Cry 2. Hocking, for one, is fed up with the conventions.

"I have been detonating the core in the mothership and stopping the release of the virus and disarming the suitcase nuke and killing the queen in the hive and shutting the gates of Hell for twenty years," he says. "Sure, it's cool, it's fun, we do it all the time — we're pretty good at it, actually. But in twenty years I have never once stopped in a game, looked my best friend in the eye, and pressed my pistol against his liver and shot him, and thought to myself 'I had to do that because he and I were not in line anymore.'"

Far Cry 2 gives you that moment. Its NPCs have the ability to work with you or against you, getting you out of binds as easy as putting you in them. In a harsh environment where you're playing between two opposing factions, at some point the scales will tip, and you'll have to decide how you'll save your skin.

"[It's a] journey into the darkest part of your psyche," says Hocking, "and [it]s' a game of asking you 'how far will you go?'"

de Blob

SYSTEM: **Wii**
CATEGORY: **ACTION** / PLAYERS: **1-4**
DEVELOPER: **BLUE TONGUE ENTERTAINMENT**
DUE: **TBA**

Even before release, de Blob is something of a landmark for Australian gaming, being, as it is, the first Wii game to be developed exclusively in our country. Based on a game created by a team of students at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands that sees players taking the role of a malleable blob capable of picking up different coloured inks with its body and painting the colourless world in bright primary colours. We recently had a chance to get some hands on time with the game and to speak with the developers, Blue Tongue Entertainment about their game.

Who first made the decision to make a game based on de Blob?

Nick Hagger ***(Producer, Blue Tongue Entertainment):*** The game was first noticed by Jon Cartwright at Studio Oz after he saw it on GamesDev.net. Jon, seeing the potential, sent it around to the decision makers at THQ, and Steve Dauterman got behind the project. THQ then approached both the student team and the City of Utrecht, and a deal was struck. Now de Blob lives in Melbourne, Australia.

Considering that button presses and thumbsticks play as much part in controlling de Blob as motion sensing why is the game being developed exclusively for the Wii?

The core game concept is so pure and innovative that it felt like it was a good fit for the Wii platform, which itself is focused more on gameplay innovation, and less on HD visuals. Other platforms were considered early on in pre-production, but THQ really wanted to demonstrate its commitment to bring fresh and exclusive content to the Wii audience. As the "de Blob" team had already shipped a title for Wii launch, they were keen to build upon their experience, and eager to bring another fun game to a platform they feel passionate about.

Following on from that, what is it like to develop for the Wii?

Developing for the Wii is fun. It's exciting to be making a game for a different style of platform, and it's challenging and rewarding to find ways to make the Wii control suite work for your game. The majority of the team have all grown up playing Nintendo games, and so it's a real honour to be making a title for a company we value and respect.

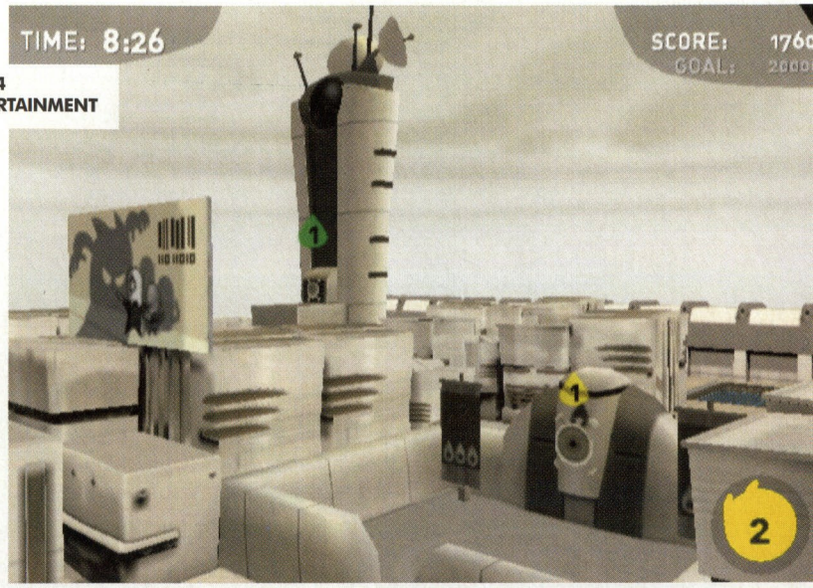
The term "casual game" is bandied about a lot at the moment – why do you describe de Blob as a casual game?

We see casual games are those real "pick up and play titles", accessible and enjoyable for a wide audience. Our core design goals were to make de Blob immediately rewarding and fun - in de Blob you make a mess with paint and stick it to the man, plain and simple. I reckon it's these elements that make de Blob for everyone.

de Blob is one of those games that really rewards a players exploration, offering increasingly difficult objectives that unlock additional content. The more time you spend painting, the more areas and objectives you will discover. We hope that de Blob offers something to all gamers who are open to fun experiences.

We know that the game has 12 levels, each lasting around 15 minutes meaning that you could potentially finish de Blob in one sitting. What are you doing to ensure the longevity and replayability of de Blob?

We have tried to create a virtual playground for gamers, with 12 feature levels and more than 15 bonus sprint levels. Feature levels are narrative anchor points for the Blob storyline, and provide a range of challenges in large, interesting environments. Feature levels have time limits between 15 minutes and 30 minutes. Players extend playtime by completing in-level challenges, accepted from their dealings with the revolutionaries positioned around the level. Complete an objective, play longer and paint longer; simply put.



Before and After: Turn drab into fab with de Blob

The sprint levels are smaller, challenge themed levels which take between 60 to 180 seconds to complete. The emphasis here is on speed rather than artistic merit. The sprint levels provide the player with a very different experience to the feature levels, and lets de Blob use some of his skills in different ways.

Then there is the multiplayer experience, where players can engage in some hot, Blob-on-Blob action. There are currently 5 competitive game modes, as well as team painting challenges.

» In de Blob you make a mess with paint and stick it to the man, plain and simple.

de Blob is very much an open ended game. We have tried to emphasis a gameplay mechanic that encourages replay and freeplay. With your colour palate and large scale environments, this game is all about exploration and expression set against a clock. No level will play the same way twice, and we think that this really shows the playability of such a different type of game on a different type of system. That's why de Blob is such a nice fit for a platform like the Wii.

How does the difficulty or complexity of the levels change as the player progresses?

As the game progresses, each level becomes more challenging as the I.N.K.T corporation steps up the resistance to the Blob's repainting of the world. Later levels present more complex challenges and more enemy types as the Blob penetrates to the heart of the I.N.K.T Corporation's stronghold. Every level also presents a range of challenge types – "one star" difficulty rating to "three star" – allowing players to take on harder challenges at any stage in the game to chase a better score.

Who do you see as the market for de Blob? Who is this "casual gamer"?

Well, from our perspective, we'd love "de Blob" to be enjoyed by open minded gamers of all ages, people who enjoy fun and engaging games. I think there is something in Blob that appeals to anyone no matter how schooled they are in gaming culture. Making "de Blob" accessible to the widest audience was one of our key design goals, and will continue to be our focus as we complete the game. As this is a game exclusive to Wii and DS – we designed de Blob specifically with these platforms in mind. Media speculation has been throwing up numerous comparisons between our game and everything from mass market games to niche innovative titles which have shaped the gaming landscape. If de Blob is somewhere in between then that is a very exciting place to be.

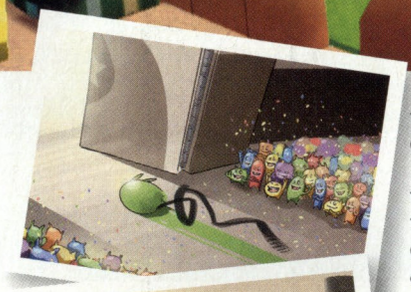
Why should Hyper readers be excited by de Blob?

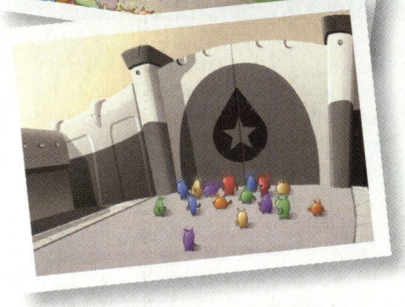
I'd hope that Hyper readers would be excited that "de Blob" is a fresh new game concept from the indie game community; it's been redesigned and developed by an Australian studio; and that it is another fun game to look forward to on the Wii.

Any one can hold a paintbrush – anyone can bounce a ball. We want to give players a chance to do both at the same time.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

de Blob is a fantastic idea. If done correctly it could even rival Katamari for pure rolling-around weirdness. We just hope that Blue Tongue realise the potential gold they're sitting on.





Can you describe the process of coming up with the design for the titular character of de Blob? We understand that when the idea was licensed that the original Blob could not be used.

Terry Lane *(Art Director):* The team's initial concepts took a similar form to the original character. He was a brightly coloured, rotund, goofy alien, filled with paint. We soon found that 'goofy' not only limited characterisation but was also wrong for the jumping, action direction the game was taking so we started to draw 'Blobs' with a bit more attitude, hero Blobs. He still needed to be friendly so we concentrated on breaking him down to just eyes and mouth and worked a lot of drawings from that basic set of features which showed he could be stupid, gentle, tough or determined.

His character art was evolving steadily but during pre-production we used a simple coloured ball for the player character in-game and while this was required by the gameplay direction that the Wii game was taking it was tough to make a ball look unique so we incorporated a morphing plasticity to our Blob which allowed us to create a separate anthropomorphic form. We added the expressive ears at this point as a way of linking both forms as well as providing a point of reference when gauging his orientation in ball form.

The final piece of the puzzle was the "urban plastic", designer vinyl toy look which gives our blob a contemporary feel. Now we have a character that assumes different shapes but retains a strong and unique identity.

You stated that de Blob has an "urban" feel – why was the decision made to stick to simple colour schemes when painting buildings rather than more urban designs like graffiti?

We are not developing an art package but a fun game that rewards the player for adding colour and musical diversity to their surroundings. The colour choice is only limited as far as it had to be for gameplay. Because the player adds colour to the whole game world, and not just detail to an already colourful one. Decoration has to be applied in broad strokes or it would take forever to paint one level. You do get to use a spectrum of colours, add bonus patterns and you can paint street furniture, like signs and benches and parts of buildings individually. That's pretty interactive. The palette had to be simple enough for everyone to use because knowing which primary colours to combine in order to get a specific secondary colour is a basic play mechanic.

The colours were carefully developed to work well in any combination, which ensures that the results are always pleasing, no matter how the level has been painted.

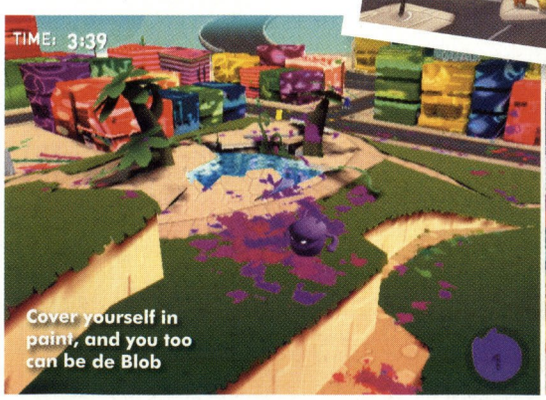
I hear what you are saying about "the urban feel", but I think we have achieved a really unique style to the setting and characters, without it feeling too hardcore, too niche. We want the game to have a broad appeal so while the animation and graphic styling's are inspired by contemporary street culture, they are not directly associated with it. We like to think the game has a unique feel.

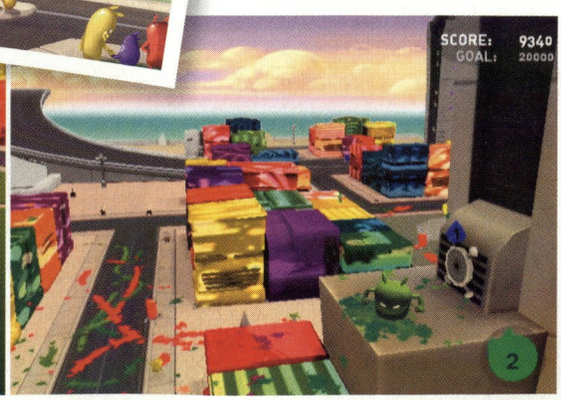
How does the music integrate with gameplay?

John Guscott *(Music Director):* The music system was designed to enhance the core gameplay element of de Blob, that is, colouring buildings and bringing a world back to life. When the world is grey and dull, the music is suitably low key and has a slightly dark feel to it. As the player adds colour to the world and progresses through the level, the music seamlessly changes and becomes a lot more vibrant and upbeat – however, just watch out for those I.N.K.T agents as getting inked has serious musical consequences. There are also musical elements attached to the actual painting of each specific building with different instruments being used for different colours. Add to that synchronised "musical sound effects" which help convey game information to the player, and you have a fun and responsive music system. The player can not only choose to paint a building because of how it looks aesthetically, but also for how it sounds. Challenge successes and chain bonuses also reward the player with extra special musical events.

Was it a design decision or a one based more on the limitations of the Wii to go with the current approach to sound?

It was very much a design decision. Apart from real time software DSP (Digital Signal Processing) there isn't actually a great deal of technical audio features that the Wii is lacking in order for the audio system to work effectively.





Bioshock

SYSTEM: **XBOX 360, PC**
CATEGORY: **FPS** / PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **IRRATIONAL**
DUE: **SOON**

Bioshock, the amazing looking spiritual successor of System Shock 2 and one of the darlings of last year's E3 is almost upon us. Not too long ago we had the opportunity to get our hands on some nearly finished code and give it a good thrashing. To cut a long story short it's fantastic, effectively bringing the FPS genre into the so-called "next-gen" with an incredible mixture of accessible gameplay, beautiful visual design and atmosphere dripping out the wahzoo, if games do in fact have dripping wahzoos.

During the event we had the chance to sit down with Joe McDonagh, senior designer at Irrational in Canberra. As is typical in interview situations we started by first asking Joe what his role in the development of Bioshock entailed. He took us by surprise, saying, "I have to be honest and stress that my contributions to the game have been miniscule."

» "There's no doubt in my mind that this is the best game we've ever made"

So how do you go about interviewing someone about a game they had little influence on? Well, as it turns out, you talk about the pitch, the concept and the hard sell. You see, even though System Shock is a fan favourite and a critical success it never really shifted many units, making Bioshock something of a nightmare to pitch to publishers. According to McDonagh, "Quite rightly when we were pitching Bioshock people were saying, "System Shock 2 hardly sold any copies, why would we want to make a sequel to that?" and to 2Ks credit they backed us and the project is so much greater than it was originally."

FILTHY LUCRE

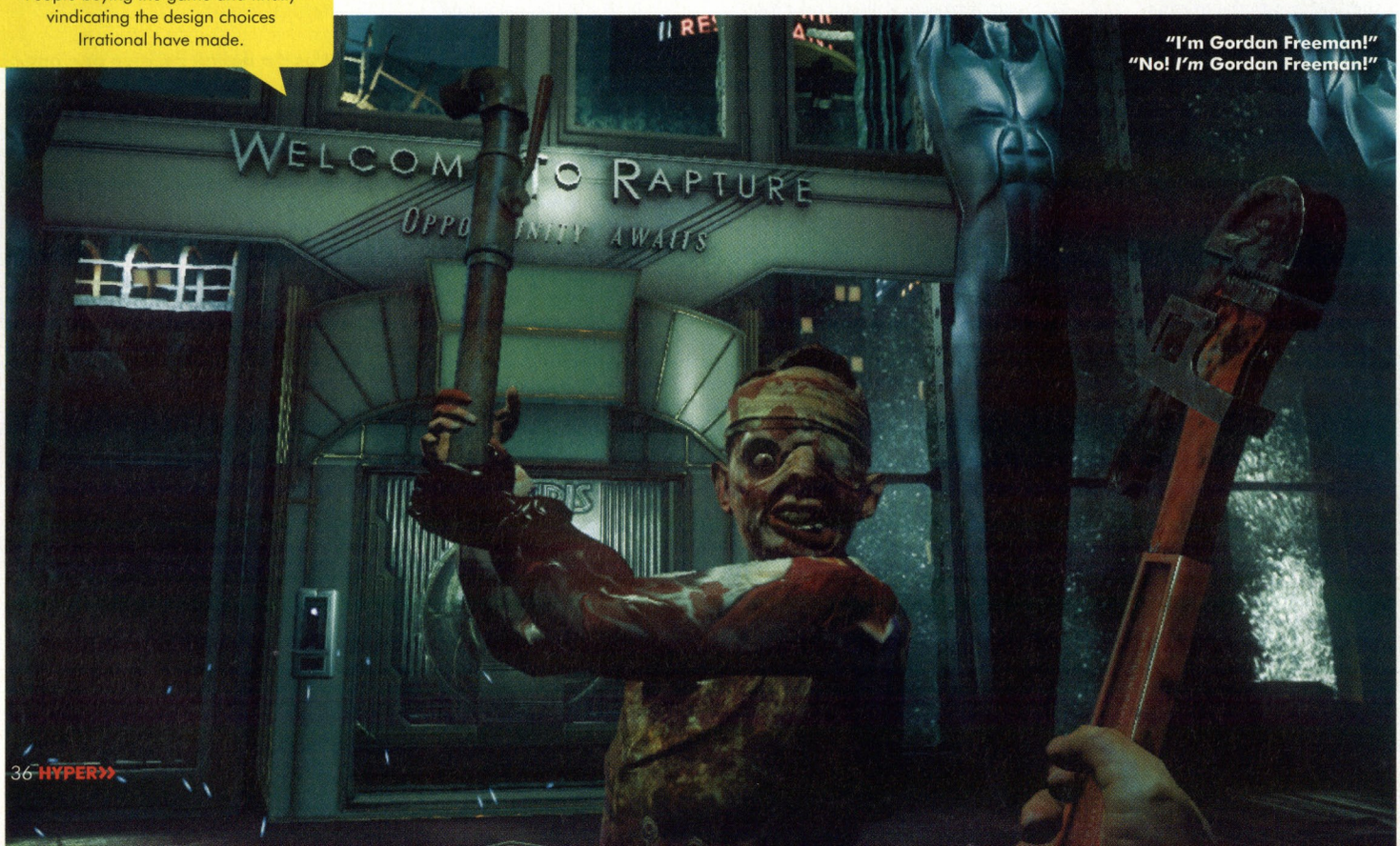
So why is money such a significant contributing factor in what seems to be a constant cycle of sequels and retreads that eschews new IPs? "It's very simple", says Joe, "The cost of game creation has increased exponentially in the last few years. System Shock 2 cost a half a million dollars to make and this cost several orders of magnitude more. What that means is, understandably, people are quite risk adverse." Not just the money men either, according to McDonagh – creators themselves are getting a little too reticent to branch out. "A lot more people's careers are on the line if something goes wrong, so people just want to make last year's pitch again. There are more non-creative people working on creative decisions so it's very hard to get a creative game made."

It's hard to fault Irrational as being anything other than creative, having taken risks with nearly every one of their games, even with their sequels to franchises. Aside from System Shock 2, the company has been responsible for such critically acclaimed games as Freedom Force, S.W.A.T. 4 and Tribes Vengeance. If fact, they've never made a poorly received game. McDonagh is not sparing in his pride when talking about Irrational, saying, "We've never made a bad game. We've never made a game that reviewed badly but we've never made a game that sells significant amounts and that's mystifying to us. That's one of the reasons why we didn't get carried away with E3. People were asking us if we were taken aback by the reception and we weren't really. It's happened before. Not on this scale mind you. We're used to the press loving what we do and getting great critical support."

GOING IT ALONE

As far as Bioshock is concerned though, not all of the press coverage has been glowing as the title has been condemned by a few sources for not including any multi-player modes; the game is a single player only experience without a nod at even the most basic of multi-player modes like Deathmatch or CTF. McDonagh explains, "People

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
People buying the game and finally vindicating the design choices Irrational have made.



"I'm Gordan Freeman!"
"No! *I'm* Gordan Freeman!"

Big Daddy: "But I only wanted a hug..."

find it very hard to understand why we've decided to do it this way, saying that they'll mark us down because there is no multi-player. That doesn't make any sense to me. Why does there have to be multi-player?"

We were going to ask if Irrational's reticence to add a multiplayer element to Bioshock stems from past experience with commercially unsuccessful games but such probing proved unnecessary, as Joe continued, "Tribes Vengeance came out sandwiched between Doom 3 and Half Life 2. That could be your answer right there. We've looked very closely at the mistakes we may have made from a creative point of view. It was very obvious to us that we tried to do too much – trying to make both an amazing single player game and an amazing multi-player game is just too hard for 25 or 30 people. You're asking the impossible. That featured very prominently in our thinking when making his game. People ask why it (Bioshock) is only single player. Well the reason why there is no multi-player is that in the majority of games nobody actually plays the multi-player. You go on Xbox Live now and you'll see that there's a bunch of people playing Gears of War and one or two other games but little else. We must have spent 30% or 40% of our resources on the multi-player in Tribes, and only a few people worldwide played it. What we thought was 'wouldn't it have been great if we'd taken all those resources and used them to make the single player better'". If our experience with Bioshock so far is anything to go by, the decision to focus solely on single player has been the right choice – hopefully the market will react in the same way.

The darkside always did have the best force powers

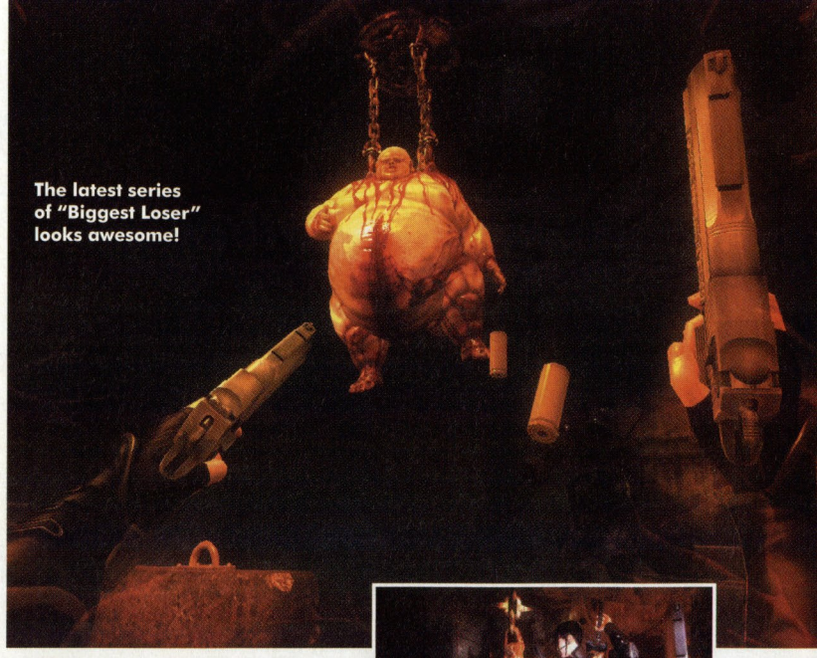
The fancy juke box didn't have Cameo's "Word Up"

We're used to hearing people talk themselves up in interviews. It's something that is basically par for the course; you talk to a developer and they talk about past successes, the amount of money they've made with previous games, the number of units they've sold and the like. Although Joe did, per-se, stick to this convention his approach was a little different, to say the least, as he explained, "We've been very focussed since the start of this game that we're all going to have to consider giving up making games if we make another game that the press loves but doesn't sell. All of our games have scored 80% or more; Freedom Force, S.W.A.T. 4, Tribes Vengeance – they've all been really good games but none of them have sold anything. We're very focussed on the fact that you can't create in a commercial vacuum. What we need to do with Bioshock is create a game that is both a huge critical success and sells a number of units so we can continue doing something we are really passionate about. There's a lot riding on this. The stakes get higher as more money is involved. If this isn't a success I don't know what we can do. I can't think of how to make a better game. There's no doubt in my mind that this is the best game we've ever made and honestly I can't think of what more we can do. We're original, we're ambitious, we've made something that is very playable, very easy on the eye and very atmospheric. I guess the question now is whether the man on the street will agree with us." <<

Bioshock certainly looks to have a few stunning birds

Clive Barker's Jericho

SYSTEM: **XBOX 360/PS3/PC**
CATEGORY: **FPS** / PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **MERCURYSTREAM**
DUE: **SEPTEMBER**



The latest series of "Biggest Loser" looks awesome!

Now I loves me some Clive Barker. I own all of his books, including his collected plays and his art book. I own his comics. I own his movies, including the rarely seen and rather crap Underworld and Rawhead Rex. I'm a definite fan of his work, ranging from his dark fantasy and horror through to his supposed "kids" books like The Thief of Always and the Abarat series. As such I'm always looking forward to what he comes out with next. You can imagine, then, how excited I was to get my hands on some preview code of Jericho, the new MercuryStream horror FPS scripted by Barker. Unfortunately, as in many of Barker's stories, the world, no matter how full of marvels, is not always a friendly place and expectations can lead you into great danger.

SO MUCH LEATHER

Clive Barker is renowned for his dark and disturbed character descriptions and you can see his hand at work in the monster design of Jericho, as well as in the character design. Players take the role of a Jericho Team, a bunch of supernaturally gifted soldier types, each with their own signature powers, weapons and fetishistic leather outfits; the heavy gunner has his right hand trapped in what is essentially a coffin due to the fire spirit trapped within it and the stomach and spewing corrosive blood and bile on victims.

» Players take the role of a bunch of supernaturally gifted soldier types...

There's nothing quite as disappointing as jumping into a highly anticipated game and being confronted, within the first few seconds of play, with the bane of modern game design, a quick-time event? That's how our experience with Jericho started. I booted up the first of the levels, the first city-within-a-city in which the game is set only to, literally, have the ground fall out from beneath my character prompting frenetic button matching to stop him falling to his doom. Nine attempts later and I finally made it into the game.

"This raspberry jam skin treatment does nothing!"

Rather than playing only one of the characters, players are given the ability to jump from one to another as long as they are in line of sight and also have limited squad based commands so you can have some of the squad members hold a position, move forward and the like. Hopefully the squad commands and team AI is tightened up significantly before release because in the code we have it's cursory at best. Squad mates shoot and reload fine but there are many enemies that require some tactics a little more advanced than "stand there and shoot it", such as Roman Legionnaire zombies with bullet proof shields and gladiator sub-bosses who can only be damaged by shooting them in unarmoured spots. Whilst it is nice to have the player as the integral gameplay element rather than just another member of the squad, the fact that the player has to do anything that requires tactics solo it calls into question the use of a squad interface in the first place.

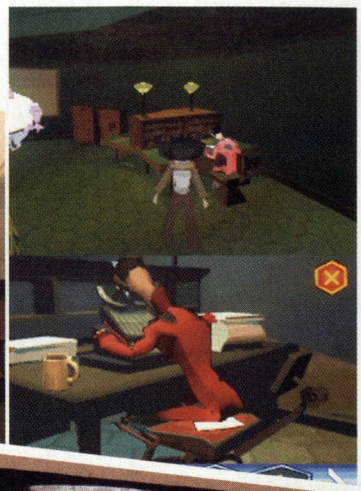
As it currently stands Jericho is looking pretty hit and miss. The plot and monster designs are shaping up well but the actual game is looking a little iffy at the moment with too simple squad commands, too much repetition of identical enemies and the use of quick-time events. Fingers crossed that the final code will be more inspiring. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Enough already with the quick-time events. They were good in God of War and Shenmue, but the ones in Jericho need a serious reworking.

Insecticide

SYSTEM: **PC, DS**
CATEGORY: **ACTION/ADVENTURE** / PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **CRACKPOT ENTERTAINMENT**
DUE: **Q4 2007**



The art design looks to be pure classic LucasArts

When the words "new", "adventure" and "game" are combined with the word "LucasArts" all in the same sentence, very strange and miraculous things begin to happen to the collective Hyper crew. Having grown up on games like Day of the Tentacle, Sam & Max and Monkey Island, we always become especially excited when ex-LucasArts developers form new companies (like Tim Schafer's Double Fine Productions) and set about recreating and modernising that sense of adventure for a new generation of gamers.

Crackpot Entertainment is one of those developers, and Insecticide is one of those games.

SNEEZED TO DEATH

Crackpot Entertainment was founded by a number of LucasArts veterans, with the titles they worked on ranging from the aforementioned point-and-click classics, right through to Dark Forces: Jedi Knight 1 and 2. The new company's first project, however, is Insecticide, an action/adventure game about anthropomorphic insect detectives in a faux film noir setting.

Insecticide is an action/adventure game about anthropomorphic insect detectives

It seems that in the future bugs will rule the Earth. Thanks to reckless genetic engineering by humans, insects long ago mutated into super-intelligent sentient humanoids, while real humans were all but made extinct by a strange genetically engineered pollen that caused all who breathed it to sneeze themselves to death.

The game picks up in the city of Troi, a futuristic insectopolis that was once a bug utopia, but has now become a hive of scum and villainy.

Enter the Insecticide Squad. Led by Detective Roachy Caruthers, this team of young lawmen (and women) includes the likes of Chrys Liszt, Hexelrod "Hex" Bloombug and Eugene "Grubbs" Grubbowski. They have but one objective: to sweep clean the crime-infested streets Troi, and return the city to its former glory.

From all the available information, you will play as Detective Chrys Liszt, a mysterious and secretive character who graduated from the mean streets of Troi to be one of the force's top policewomen. Chrys's enigmatic past and nightmarish flashbacks will also factor into Insecticide's overarching storyline, through which the player will have to control Chrys in both action levels and adventure-style detective sections.

Crackpot is describing the action levels as being "pure platforming action" with all the shooting, jumping and dodging you'd expect from the genre. There will be a variety of insect-themed weapons, including "the pollinator" (an explosive pollen gun) and the "nectar blaster" (which shoots a hardened ball of nectar), as well as power-ups and other action game staples. Players can also use the DS's touch screen (or the mouse in the PC version) to aim their weapons, which should give the game's shooting sections some credibility for both PC and DS players.

Detective mode is something adventure fans will know well, since it's all about solving puzzles, interacting with people and the environment and using items – in traditional adventure game style.

Visually, Insecticide is also looking suitably stylish. The art design is highly reminiscent of games like Day of the Tentacle or Grim Fandango, and upon first seeing the game in action, we nearly mistook it for a Double Fine game, since the character design bears a striking resemblance to Tim Schafer's Psychonauts. Which is definitely no bad thing.

Both in concept and design, Insecticide is already looking like a promising action/adventure blend. With it's release set tentatively for the end of the year we'll definitely be keeping a watchful eye on this game for the next couple of months. <<

As ZZ Top might say... She's got legs (four actually)

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Insecticide is already looking interesting, but if it can approach the kind of quality we've seen from other former LucasArts' developers, like Double Fine Productions, we'd be over the freakin' moon!

WAR GAMES

War. It's the potato of gaming. Whether it's the Germans versus the Russians, the Israelis versus the Palestinians or the US versus China versus the Middle East, war is a staple for game developers. A tried and true scenario that, over the years, has served as the basis for countless games.

Some of our favourite games are war-themed: Call of Duty, Battlefield 1942, Red Orchestra, Ghost Recon, Medal of Honour: Allied Assault and the granddaddy of them all, Wolfenstein 3D. And then you have the RPGs, the turn-based strategy games, real-time strategy games and the flight sims, such as the brilliant IL-2 series.

Militaries, now recruiting from the web generation, have embraced the genre. In recent years, dozens of games designed specifically for the purposes of recruitment and training have popped up. These games often look, play and feel just like poplar civilian titles. Our very own Australian Defence Force collaborated with Bohemia Interactive to create Virtual Battlespace, a war sim that's similar to — and, indeed, based on the engine of — Operation: Flashpoint. Similarly, the US Army has worked with of id software and Pandemic Studios, to develop Marine Doom and Full Spectrum Warrior respectively.

Despite the popularity of war games, both with the armed forces and civilians, we've recently found ourselves thinking about the tastefulness of it all, particularly with regards to games that deal with modern conflicts. We've wondered, too, about the effectiveness or even the appropriateness of recruitment games like America's Army and ADF: Aviator.

And so we turned to Matt, Mark, Casey and Colan—four men who are not only gamers, but members of the Australian Defence Force as well.

Ghost Recon: War, what is it good for? Games obviously...

[below] BF2 guy makes war, not love.
[bottom] Red Orchestra guy does the same.

Hyper: Can you give us a brief run-down of your career in the ADF?

Matt: Twelve years in the Army. A mixture of time spent in the Royal Australian Regiment (infantry) and Australian Intelligence Corps.

Mark: Well, my name is Mark Williams and I am a 27-year-old Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Navy, where I hold the job of a Warfare Officer. So basically, I'm the guy who stands on the bridge and directs the helmsman, reports to the captain, plans the navigation, sits in the ops room ... you get the picture! I have served on frigates, been peacekeeping and have recently been second-in-command (XO) of a patrol boat, mine hunter and a heavy landing craft, so I've experienced a lot. I also worked for a stint in Recruiting in Brisbane, which was also very interesting.

Casey: I joined the Army Reserve in 1997, transferring in 1999 to the ARA in the Royal Australian Engineers. Initially joining the 8 CER (Combat Engineer Regiment) in Newcastle, I moved into 1 CER in Darwin followed by 5 CER in Penrith. I am now based in Bandiana, which is on the NSW/VIC border, with the Land Warfare Development Centre.

Colan: Eight years in the Army in the Royal Australian Signals Corps, providing communications to infantry soldiers at the Section and Brigade level, CT Forces and Defence Leaders/Executives. This involved patrolling in the bush with a portable HF or VHF radio, driving around in a fitted-for-radio Land Rover with HF and VHF, and cruising around in a suit with the Chief of the Defence Force or Commander of Special Operations. I served on Operation Belisi in Bougainville and also travelled with and provided secure communications to the Chief of the Defence Force for four years. What I would like to emphasise is that all ADF soldiers train in the basic infantry skills [and] specialise in another skill (communications) to support dedicated infantry soldiers, who are the true war fighters. I have never been in combat but have done plenty of training for it.

Is gaming a popular pastime for people in the military?

Colan: In my opinion those that game in the military are casual gamers. Gaming is not a popular pastime.

Matt: Consoles used to be hugely popular back in the mid '90s because young soldiers normally lived in rooms on the barracks. Space was very limited so no one really wanted to go to the trouble (or expense) of buying a PC. The Nintendo 64 and original PlayStation were the weapons of choice and we'd all gather around in someone's room for a round of Gran Turismo or 007 Goldeneye. PC gaming [has been] gaining a lot of popularity in recent years.

Mark: Definitely. The sailors often have an Xbox or PS2 set up in their living areas onboard. And let's just say my laptop has saved me plenty of boring nights off-watch at sea! And when you have a bunch of predominantly young males/females with a high disposable income ... well, they game a lot.

Casey: Judging by the forums on our internal network, the gaming folder sees a lot of traffic. Battlefield 2 is mentioned a lot, as is World of Warcraft ... but everyone has their faults.

So what do you guys play?

Matt: I play Red Orchestra a bit, although because it's really a multiplayer game, it's sometimes difficult to find the time. I quite enjoyed the Ghost Recon series of games. It was refreshing to have to take your time and have sound planning and patience rewarded with success. Rushing in blind always ended in tears. I was never a fan of the "hit points" style of health system. If you are shot, you are out ... end of story.

Casey: Online I play Armed Assault with a gaming community known as XDF (Xtreme Defence Force). In a LAN with friends, it's Rainbow Six: Vegas and Ghost Recon. On my own, I rate Company of Heroes and Vietcong. I'll occasionally get online to play one-off games of Battlefield 2, Battlefield 2142 and the Dawn of War series. Knights of the Old Republic 1 and 2, Diablo and Sacred are favourites too—so I wouldn't say it has to be all military-based. I forgot to mention SWAT 4 and the Max Payne games as favourites too.

Mark: A bit of everything, really.

"I WAS NEVER A FAN OF THE "HIT POINTS" HEALTH SYSTEM. IF YOU ARE SHOT, YOU ARE OUT..."

I love the Total War series, but I also go in for Civilisation IV and Dawn of War. When I have the luxury of my home-based broadband, I'm right into Battlefield 2 and 2142, World of Warcraft and anything else I can get my hands on. The Wii is really getting some love lately!

Colan: I play PC games, mostly online multiplayer first person shooters. I am currently playing America's Army, Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter, Unreal Tournament 2004, Rainbow Six: Raven Shield and Vegas.

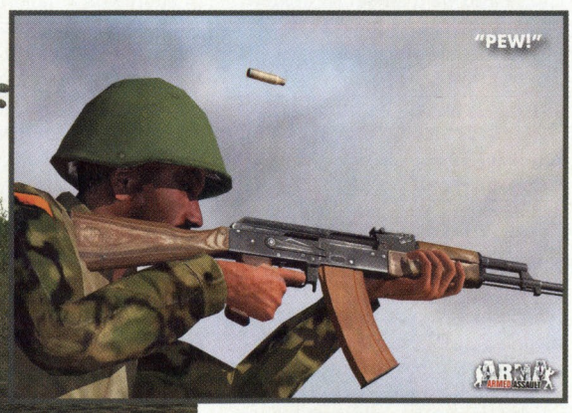
Armed Assault: Tanks for this screen to caption Malky!

Would you say you prefer realistic titles?

Matt: Absolutely. I know that's probably a contradiction considering I play games to escape, but if I'm going to play a role in a game, I'd like the realism to be there.

Colan: I definitely prefer realistic titles, but have certainly enjoyed unrealistic games.

Mark: Yes and no. I liked military-themed games, but [I'm just] as happy to raid Karazhan in World of Warcraft or play Zelda and Guitar Hero 2 on my consoles. I played Silent Hunter and Fleet Commander a while back, thinking they would be good naval games. A hour staring at wave tops, looking for the sign of a ship on the horizon in Silent Hunter or staring at a radar plot in Fleet Commander, and I was thinking to myself, "Gee, this is just like work. I've had enough!" *press quit*. If I play a game, I want it to be a means of escapism ... not a replication of my occupation!



Casey: [With XDF], we liked to play [Armed Assault] as serious as the game engine allows. So, in saying that, us guys that have military experience can have that enjoyment in the game too—i.e. target indicators, formations and so on, as opposed to a "Rambo shoot," which we will occasionally have to dust off the cobwebs. When I first get a game, I like to play on the hardest difficult with no HUD. With Vietcong, I played on Vietnam difficulty with no other screen info. Needless to say, I was dead within ten minutes of the first mission.

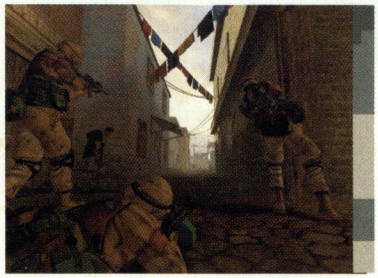
Obviously a game can't be completely accurate in its portrayal of military life and combat, but would you say any games come close—at least in terms of tactics and weaponry?

Casey: Armed Assault, definitely. A lot of people [in the online community] are spitting out mods for realistic sound effects, particle effects and explosions, close-to-real-life uniforms and modelling. Check out http://www.armedassault.info, it's a great place to start. Virtual Battlespace is similar to Armed Assault, [which] virtually [uses] the same engine, but [is] more directed at law enforcement and defence agencies. Very handy tool.

Mark: Battlefield 2 is definitely up there in terms of realistic weapons and squad tactics. While it's very watered down, it's probably as close as you will get. If you fire a .50 calibre sniper rifle safely ensconced [in] a clump of bushes at someone's head ... well, the results are pretty self-explanatory in both real-life and on-screen!

Matt: You're right. I've never played a game that comes within a bee's dick of the adrenaline rush of the real thing. Even training for assaults on exercise with blanks is far more intense than any games. The closet one yet, for me, has to be Red Orchestra, but with one important caveat. Unless you are playing with a team who communicates well, against another team that's communicating well, the experience isn't as realistic. I think you also have to be playing against human opponents for the best experience. I've not yet seen an AI in a game that accurately replicates the way a human can improvise and adapt to changing circumstances. People will always surprise you, sometimes for the best as they make a silly error for judgement in the heat of a situation.

America's Army: Now Invading your PC, as well as the Middle East



Colan: In my opinion, there are many games—even casual games—that come close to reflecting combat tactics, but there are few that come close in terms of weapons. The current games Armed Assault and America's Army come close in terms of weapon handling. For example, when the front of your body comes close to an object, your weapon is moved from the firing position. When you run, your weapon is no longer in a firing position. There is simulated recoil. Reloading a weapon takes as long as it takes to reload a weapon and the breathing of your avatar affects where your weapon points. On a related note, the ADF uses a weapons simulator called WTSS (Weapon Training Simulation System). WTSS is an indoor small arms training facility designed to permit the conduct of practices ranging from basic marksmanship through to section battle shooting, employing interactive video or computer-generated imagery. Night practices can be simulated using Night Fighting Equipment (NFE). The WTSS utilises actual weapons, which have been converted to realistically simulate "live" fire by the use of compressed air to function the working parts, electronic sound effects and laser, which registers the fall of shots on screen.

Videogames have been used for training purposes. In the 90s, the US Marines had Marine Doom. And now there's Full Spectrum Warrior and Tactical Iraqi. What do you make of games like these?

Mark: Knowing that most of our recruits are now being drawn from Generation Y, trainees really relate to this type of training. Even when I was learning to drive warships about five years ago, we learned on a huge hydraulic bridge simulator that had a 190 degree curved screen, which could have any part of the coastline/harbor and nearly any part of Australia projected onto it. The simulator would rock with the motion from the sea and the ships handled with the same characteristics as their real, seagoing counterparts. In essence, my first forays in [driving] a few hundred million dollars of sleek warship was done on a videogame. In fact, some of our weapons training in the ADF is now done on indoor "electronic" ranges with gas-powered rifles. You can have a group of people all firing at a giant screen simulating an outdoor range or enemy environment, which registers accurately where you have hit the target ... up to simulated ranges of 300 metres and greater. And, adding to that, the rifles recoil as if you had been firing real, live rounds out on an outdoor range. So yes, videogame-inspired training systems definitely have their uses.

Matt: I haven't played any of these games in any great depth so I couldn't really comment. I do think sometimes the emphasis on realism is stacked heavily toward accurate uniforms, weapons, realistic environments and graphics. I'd like to see more realism in tactics and the AI.

Casey: I had Full Spectrum Warrior on Xbox. That game, to me, was like another version of Navy SEALS, or whatever that [PlayStation game was called]. Games like Armed Assault and Virtual Battlespace have the means to create missions and other elements like patrol courses, weather and damage. Full Spectrum Warrior was scripted in my eyes. [In] Armed Assault, the map is like 100 square kilometres, allowing for freedom of mission execution.

You could enter a code in Full Spectrum Warrior to access the original, military version ...

Casey: Yeah, I did that. Wasn't that flash.

So do you think it's of any use as a training tool?

Casey: To me, personally, no. You don't see our defence force using it.

Full Spectrum Warriors: Apparently their spectrum is pretty full

THE BOLT GOES IN THE RECEIVER...

Militaries from around the world — including our own — have played around with training games. The Americans are particularly keen on them and have poured millions upon millions of dollars into projects such as Full Spectrum Warrior, Full Spectrum Command, Gator Six and Battle Stations 21. They've also commandeered a number of civilian games for their own purposes, including Medal of Honour: Allied Assault, Battlefield 1942 and—we shit you not—StarCraft. If you're curious about the games they play, you can see a complete list at http://www.dodgamecommunity.com/.

Our defence force favours Virtual Battlespace, a game developed in conjunction with Bohemia Interactive. Virtual Battlespace—commonly referred to as VBS—is similar to the civilian-oriented war sim, Operation: Flashpoint. Indeed, it uses the same engine.

As Casey explained, Virtual Battlespace is marketed exclusively to militaries and law enforcement agencies. It's highly customisable, giving these organisations the power to come up with their own missions and scenarios.

Bohemia Interactive has released a number of add-on packs for Virtual Battlespace. Some target specific forces, such as the ADF, while others offer training scenarios for specialised fields such as artillery and covert operations.

"MOST OF OUR RECRUITS ARE FROM GENERATION Y, THEY REALLY RELATE TO THIS TRAINING"

VBS1: Why not just bust out a dragon punch?

Since its worldwide release in 2004, Virtual Battlespace has become incredibly popular. It's used not only by the US Marines and Australian Defence Force, but also the Canadian Forces, Israeli Defence Force, Royal Netherlands Army, New Zealand Defence Force and the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence.

Training games aren't just about tactics and weaponry, though. The Tactical Language & Culture series, for instance, emphasises the importance of winning "hearts and minds." In Tactical Iraqi—which we suppose could be termed a RPG—players have to wander around a town and, using a microphone, chat to civilians in Arabic.

Also available are Tactical Pashto, designed for use by soldiers operating in Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, and Tactical French, which is targeted at troops working in Franco-African nations such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

ADF: Aviator: It helps our military fight the Kilrathi menace

On a related note, militaries have also used games as recruiting tools. The US Navy did one, the US Army has America's Army and our own defence force has ADF: Aviator. What are your thoughts on these?

Matt: I suppose you'd have to ask the relevant forces if it's been a success. I have no problems per se with the concept—I think it's clever marketing. I'd want to be certain we were targeting the right audience to minimise the chances of the wrong type of people wasting their and the military's time by turning up to basic training for a few days and realising it just isn't for them.

Casey: You know, I've been meaning to download [ADF: Aviator] for a while, but haven't as yet, so I can't really comment. A lot of people are into games these games—haven't really thought of it. As long as [the ADF] aren't giving the impression that military life is all simulations and the like. [Games] can be a good insight as to what equipment we use, and to make the individual think, "Hey, I wonder what it would be like to shoot this or fly that for real."

Mark: I think these serve as good recruiting tools, as they serve a rather successful PR function. Teenagers love to play games so why not use it to the ADF's advantage? The only problem I have with this kind of approach is that on the one hand, we have a government who is all too happy to use videogames to recruit potential officers/soldiers/sailors/airmen and women into the military, whose primary task is to deny the enemy and defeat him in a time of confrontation... using violence if we have to, which of course results in the unfortunate loss of life. Now this same government is the one who won't let adults in Australia play a game that could be deemed as having an R rating due to their ideas about censorship. It's a complete paradox.

Colan: I believe games as a recruiting tool is a great idea. America's Army gives people a feel for what it might be like to be in combat by introducing them to [such] things as weapon handling, combat noises, reaction time, scanning of terrain (fore, middle and background) and squad and individual tactics. [It] gives you an understanding of the difference between cover and concealment, effective communications between squad members (if voice communications are available), identifying targets to squad members and covering fire. [It] gets people used to working in a team to achieve a goal.

Can games leave people with a false—perhaps dangerously false—impression of what militaries do and what combat is like?

Colan: Games can accurately reflect what militaries do, but they leave people with a dangerously false impression of what combat is like. So do movies, books and television. How do you, why would you and should you simulate the following common conditions of combat: being dirty and smelly, being generally malnourished, having your nerves regularly at breaking point, long periods of

Battlefield 2: "Aw crud, why do I always get stuck with the knife..."

Rainbox Six: "Rainbox" is an awesome typo

absolute boredom where you would kill the bloke next to you if you could be in your happy place, being constantly subject to the weather and local flora and fauna (mosquitos), living in conditions that are normally considered unhygienic or being so scared for your life that your most basic instincts of fight or flight take over and you shit your pants.

Matt: Undoubtedly it gives people a false impression of what the military is like, but no more than Hollywood has. I don't think the impressions would be dangerously false. If you ever end up in a combat situation, you won't be employing tactics learned in Battlefield 1942 unless you are feeling mighty suicidal. You will be using all your military training in real-life, and that type of stuff is drilled into all soldiers, so it's unlikely that you'll have a brain-fart in a combat situation and run off to capture the flag.

Casey: For sure. It's a game, it's entertainment. Virtual Battlespace, however, has the ability to be a fantastic mission rehearsal tool. Of course, the physical exertion is not shown by sitting at a computer terminal, but the mental aspect definitely [is, when you ask yourself] "where should I be looking?" and "where am I in relation to my mate?"

Mark: Funny you ask that. On the whole I would say most people can [tell] the difference between what is real and what isn't. But it is worth noting that some of the biggest periods for recruiting numbers in the US (and also in Australia) came when Top Gun was released. I joke you not. When I worked in recruiting in Brisbane I was told that the day after Top Gun or a similar movie was aired on TV, they would get inundated with people wanting to join up.

Possibly the most disturbing example of such behaviour occurred when I was interviewing a Year 12 student who wanted to apply as an infantryman in the Army last year. When I asked him what skills he could bring to the military from his civilian life, he informed me—and I utter no word of a lie—"Well, I play a lot of Rainbow Six, and you get to fight in jungles and the snow and stuff, so I've had a bit of experience fighting in different terrains." Needless to say, his interview finished a lot quicker then he would have liked! I was left shaking my head.

Should war be more of a taboo subject for games? Particularly in relation to current wars—the War in Iraq, for instance, is one of the main theatres in Kuma/War.

Colan: I played Kuma/War when it came out and it was a great game. It was fun fighting the War in Iraq virtually. I especially like the relevance to the conflicts (there are a couple of Afghanistan missions) at the time and how the game developers were progressively releasing new content that copied what was happening during the War in Iraq. I would have continued playing it, but the game did not really take off in Australia. In regards to war being a taboo subject for games, I would suggest that fighting and conflict [has been] part of the communication from day dot. I do not believe that the virtual representation of armed conflict should be a taboo for games, because it helps us understand ourselves better as individuals and collectively. It is a daily reality and I am thankful that Australia does not have the centuries old blood feuds that other areas of the globe endure. They really must be terrible places to live.

Mark: This type of stuff sells games, doesn't it? Look at Battlefield 2—USA versus China versus the Evil Arab States! To a degree it's quite topical, isn't it? I think this kind of branding/content is inevitable. After all, no one [would be] interested in playing a game where you take control of the Madagascarian Army in its struggle to beat the evil Icelandic regime, would they? Modern theatres of combat provide a wealth of content for developers to add to, a lot of reference material, and I guess appeal to more people as well. War is something humans have developed into an art form, sadly.

Casey: If people are going to play that card, how about we discuss the online gaming that really gets a person in trouble—online gambling? Enough said. I could understand veterans having problems with games that depict the Normandy Invasion on June 6th 1944, or the jungles of Vietnam ... but a lot of effort and respect goes into making those games to give the player the best possible [way of] experiencing what the particular conflict was like.

> **"I HAVE ALWAYS LIKED PLAYING WAR – I HAD TOY GUNS WHEN I WAS A KID."**

Matt: That's an interesting question. I'm not a huge fan of violence for its own sake and I'd prefer to see games like Grand Theft Auto and Manhunt scrutinised before war games are. Being a parent, I have concerns with violent games getting into the hands of kids. I know this probably makes me sound like a bit of a wowser, but I'd really like to see some quality research done into the effects of videogame violence on kids. To answer your question; in principle, no; I don't think war should be a taboo subject in games. I think the glorification of war is something that should be frowned upon. Playing a game that is based on a current conflict seems to be in poor taste to me, however if you asked me to state "why?" I don't think I could put my finger on it. Maybe it shows a lack of respect to the people involved in the conflict be they military or civilian.

So, do you want to add anything we haven't asked you about?

Casey: Yeah, I'd like to. With the games I play online and with friends, it's the teamwork aspect that I get the thrill out of. When you enter a room with a team and you're actually planning how you're going to execute that entry, and everything goes like clockwork, it feels awesome. Mind you, if your hand slips on that mouse or you press the wrong button and the grenade falls at your feet, the jokes that fly from your mates can stick to you for months. In the end, it's a game and the game maker's job is to produce the best possible experience. Bring on Call of Duty 4!

Colan: You didn't ask why I play the games I do. I am motivated to play online multiplayer first person shooters because [I gain] satisfaction [from] achieving goals and/or defeating the enemy via superior teamwork. I get exhilarated from playing. It's a mental challenge. I have always liked playing war—I had toy guns when I was a kid. I get to socialise with other online gamers via voice communications. I'm part of an online community. I'm also probably addicted to online gaming ... <<

WE WANT YOU!

AN EXPOSE OF A WORLD OF PROPAGANDA, ZIONISTS AND JINGOISM

by Christopher Taylor

IN September last year, the Global Islamic Media Front—an organisation with links to Al-Qaeda—released a game called Night of Bush Capturing. It was a shooter of the first person persuasion, set in an American military base. You could tell it was an American base because everywhere you looked there were huge portraits of Nouri al-Maliki. Posters of Tony Blair. Gargantuan billboards displaying the dastardly George W. Bush's face. And because, too, there was a sign next to the entrance that read "American Base."

Your mission in Night of Bush Capturing was simple. You were to infiltrate the base and fight your way through the hordes of wicked imperialist troops stationed there, until you reached the number one villain—the boss—President Bush himself.

It was a terrible game, of course. The level design—political decor aside—was bland and unimaginative. The anti-western jokes, of which there were a lot, fell flat. That being said, the game was hilarious in that it was just riddled with irony. But more on that later ...

What it lacked in quality and production values, Night of Bush Capturing made up for in spirit. It was openly political. It was angry. Firebrand. This wasn't Grand Theft Auto or Manhunt, where the presence of a serious point amid all the dick jokes and pop culture references is debatable. This was a game that wore its ugly little heart on its sleeve.

The Global Islamic Media Front isn't the only political organisation to have turned to games as a way of spreading a message. Militaries, racist groups and peace activists have played with the medium too, with varying degrees of competency and tastefulness. Even the United Nations World Food Programme has done a game *(http://www.food-force.com/)*.

These political games aren't just obscure terrorist propaganda pieces, limited to the dingiest corners of the web. Some—most notably America's Army—are very popular and the result of millions of dollars worth of R&D. Others, such as Ethnic Cleansing and Special Force, have faced a great deal of controversy and criticism from the mainstream media.

We're curious about this sort of thing. About our beloved medium being used to spread some rather interesting and ... disturbing ideologies. So we decided to investigate. To don our "press" caps and find out how these games work, what they're promoting and who they're aimed at.

JOIN THE ARMY, LADS

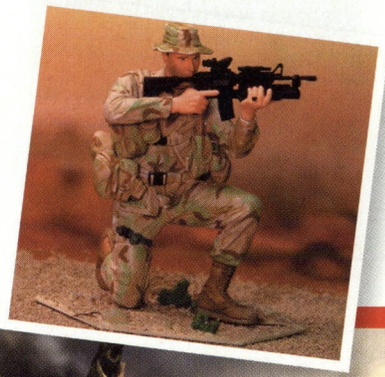
Out of all the games we mention in this piece, the one you're most likely to have played is America's Army. As the official site *(http://www.americasarmy.com/)* makes clear, America's Army is, on one level, a recruitment tool. A way of getting young Americans to consider a career in the US Army.

But it's a gross oversimplication to say that America's Army is only intended to recruit new troops. Ever wondered why the game is available to those of us who live outside the US? The answer is simple—the US Army wants the world to know just how good it is at what it does.

If you're yet to play the game, we should explain that it makes quite a fuss about completing the training missions. The training missions are quite elaborate, requiring you to perform all manner of tasks, from navigating obstacle courses within an allotted time to doing quizzes about battlefield triage.

These missions, some of which are quite difficult, must be passed before you can access the meat and potatoes of the game—the online, squad versus squad component. They're not just there to give you the skills required to survive in the multiplayer mode, though, they're there to teach folks abroad—particularly those giving thought to joining a military or organisation that's not America's friend—just how skilled and well-trained US Army personnel are when it comes to kicking arse and taking names.

[top] **America's Army**
[above] **Night of Bush Capturing: For once a game that is so bad, it actually is a terrorist act**
[below] **Army action figures: Because real men play with dolls**

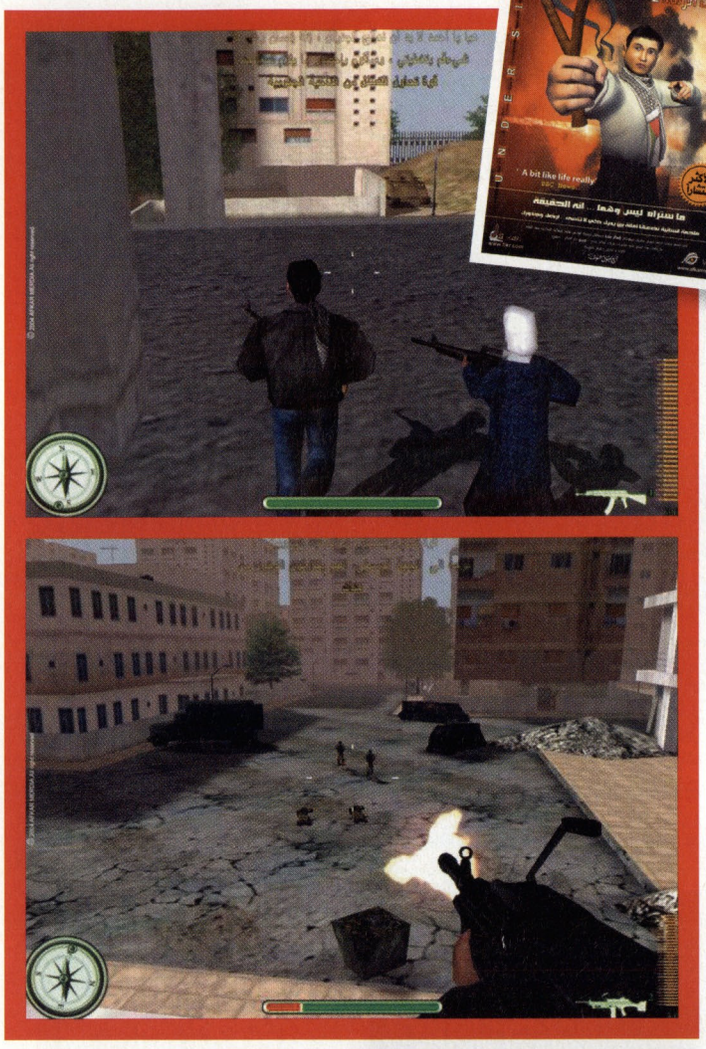


It's not just about putting the fear of God into olive-skinned foreigners. The game makes an effort to endear the US to players. For starters, even though it's team-based—with a US Army team facing off against an "Op Force"—you're never shooting at Americans. The other team always appears as the evildoers, while yours always wears US colours.

On top of that, the homepage has a section dedicated to "real heroes"—current US Army servicemen who are "on the forefront in the defence of freedom." The US Army is even planning on selling action figures modelled on said heroes *(http://www.americasarmy.com/realheroes/figure_request.php)*.

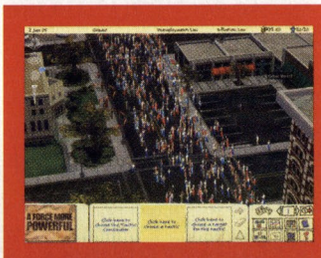
America's Army is a mass-market game. We doubt it's a coincidence that it's so similar to Counter-Strike, which was still very popular when America's Army was released in 2002. And, although it's obviously a violent game—with people getting shot and blown up, as tends to happen in war—there's no blood or gore, meaning the ESRB has given it a Teen rating (the equivalent of our PG).

No expense has been spared in developing and maintaining "the official US Army game." It's based on the second gen Unreal Engine, which wasn't cheap when the game was first available. The graphics are reasonably good and the game itself is relatively free of bugs. Updates are released regularly. Much like the Battlefield games, there are numerous medals



and awards to earn in America's Army, giving it staying power.

[above] Under Siege: So where's Steven Seagal? [below] Left Behind: Look to the sky... ALIAMS! Oh wait, it's just Christ...



GIVE ME AMBIGUITY OR GIVE ME SOMETHING ELSE

Over in the Middle East, the games of Syrian developer Afkar Media have found a similarly large audience, although they've attracted serious criticism from the western press.

Under Ash and its sequel, Under Siege, both deal with the Israel/Palestine situation. Unlike America's Army, they were developed on the cheap and it shows. Nonetheless, these games have sold really well in a region that, according to lead designer Radwan Kasmiya, has a serious piracy problem.

The west has accused Kasmiya of trying to recruit young Palestinians to the Intifada—the movement that violently opposes supposed Israeli occupation of Arab lands. It's not hard to see why our press—or rather, the American press—is concerned. When you die in both the games, a little message pops up on the screen explaining that the Israeli authorise will identify your corpse, find your family and torture them. Provocative, to say the least.

The box art, too, could be almost seen as glorifying the whole stone-throwing thing. And the official trailers, available from *http://www.underash.net/en_download.htm*, show Israeli troops and civilians killing innocent, unarmed Palestinians for no apparent reason.

Kasmiya is aghast at accusations that he's promoting martyrdom and violent resistance against Israel. "When I made Under Ash," he told us, "I didn't include any 'healing method', medics or any blah blah that makes the player recover his health after getting shot. The ammo was very limited. And, if you shoot any civilian, whether he was Israeli or Palestinian, you will lose some of your own health. After you finish [Under Ash and Under Siege], you will get the message that your problem won't be solved by violence. I create games that help make people understand more, and urge them to get more interested in special issues that the media are trying to hide. In Under Siege, for example, you play the role of a Palestinian family with different backgrounds. At the end of the game, most of the family members will die. It is not a game, it is a sad reflection of reality."

Unsurprisingly, Kasmiya is no fan of America's Army. "I think it is a dangerous recruiting tool," he said, "funded by taxpayers to convince their children to be part of the mighty American Army that is spreading 'freedom and President Bush voices' worldwide. In short, it is political propaganda."

Just as Kasmiya's games have encountered criticism for having a message that could be interpreted by Palestinian kids as a green light to rush outside and start pegging rocks at tanks, Darfur is Dying has been torn to pieces for having a message that's apparently too simplistic.

As the name implies, Darfur is Dying – which is available free-of-charge from *http://www.darfurisdying.com/* – deals with the crisis in Darfur, a region in western Sudan. It's an incredibly complex situation, fuelled by years of civil war and a resentment of Arabs that dates back hundreds of years, but the game suggests that this could all be stopped if the West intervened.

Nonetheless, the game itself is quite involved, especially when you consider that it was done in Flash. You're tasked with running a Darfurian village. You must ensure that its residents are reasonably healthy and have enough food and water. To collect water, you're required to select a villager and guide them out to a well a few kilometres away, avoiding roaming bands of Janjaweed militiamen along the way. Frightful stuff.

NO HOOKERS AND SEVERED HEADS, THANKS

America's Army has been an undeniably successful exercise for the US Army, but the same cannot by said of some other political games—most notably Left Behind: Eternal Forces. Based on Tim LaHaye's series of books, Left Behind is a strategy game that sees you battling demons and converting folks to Christianity en masse post-Rapture. The heroes in this game aren't Orc Warchiefs or Space Marine Librarians, but priests and quiet, devout middle-aged gentlemen from middle-class backgrounds.

You might think that Left Behind is targeted specifically at the evangelical market, but you'd be wrong. According to *http://www.eternalforces.com/*, the developers intend to cash-in on the success of Christian-flavoured books and films such as CS Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia and The Passion of the Christ.

The developers are quick to address any concerns parents may have about a violent RTS not being the ideal medium for teaching kids about Jesus' message of peace and love. As they explain in their FAQ, Left Behind doesn't feature blood. There aren't any abortion clinics. None of the violence is directed at police officers or sex workers. No one gets their head chopped off. There's no sex, severed limbs or "morally reprehensible" conduct. And no, there aren't any "Bible-bashing believers, Bible-thumpers [or] radical extremists killing in the name of God." And you'll never, not ever see any intestines.

Ever. You have their word on that.

Despite doings its best to be inoffensive and family-friendly—well, as family-friendly as a game about mass religious conversion can be—Left Behind hasn't set the world on fire. Perhaps the studio should've gone out of its way to piss people off instead, just like Hezbollah did with their official game—Special Force.

Special Force was primarily a response to America's Army. Just as America's Army glorified the many and varied exploits of the US military, Special Force highlighted how totally rad Hezbollah was. Or something. It was a crap game, but the subject matter meant that it was briefly popular in South Korean gaming cafes when it was came out last year.

RACIAL PATRIOTS

Speaking of controversy, there have been a few games released by white supremacist groups over the years. The most infamous, Ethnic Cleansing, challenges players to head into ghettos and subways to take out African-Americans, Latinos and Jews—all of whom, according to the plot, are being controlled by the former Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, from his "Jewish Control Centre."

Ethnic Cleansing is the polar opposite of America's Army. It's as niche a title as you can get. The premise is intended to appeal only to the white supremacist audience, as demonstrated by its look and feel. The two skins you can pick from for your avatar are a Neo-Nazi skinhead and Klansman in full regalia. In the sequel, White Law, you play the role of a police officer that lost his job because of his racist beliefs. In Zog's Nightmare *(http://www.nukeisrael.com/zognightmare2.htm)*, a similar game, you're a "racial patriot" tasked with defending the headquarters of the Nationalist Socialist Movement from "unclean hordes" of "murderous Jews" and their "black gangster" allies. In the game's storyline, the Nationalist Socialist Movement has millions of members and is poised to seize control of the White House.

The humour is pretty specific too. Resistance Records, the developer of Ethnic Cleansing, proudly states that the game features "real Negro sounds recorded on the spot with real niggers." If you have a squiz at the trailer *(http://www.resistance.com/ethniccleansing/EC256.wmv)*, you'll notice that these "real Negro sounds" are in fact the cries of apes and chimpanzees. On a side note, Resistance Records just so happen to be the label that that creepy Prussian Blue duet are signed to.

"Ethnic Cleansing is the polar opposite of America's Army. [You play as a] Klansman in full regalia."

Z IS FOR ZIONIST

On the official site of Ethnic Cleansing, there's a somewhat disturbing review that mentions the game's potential as an educational tool for "White" kids. While it could be argued that Ethnic Cleansing, like Special Force and Under Ash, does target youngsters indirectly, there are political games that have been created specifically for children.

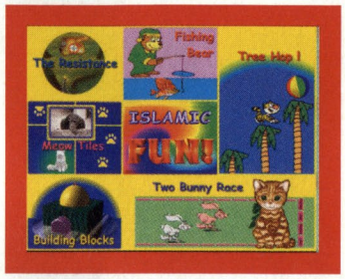
Islamic Fun is an edutainment game. At first glance, it's nice and wholesome. You could mistake it for a Muhammad-flavoured Bible Game. Harmless theological entertainment, in other words. But then you notice that one of the bundled minigames, entitled The Resistance, involves stepping into the shoes of a Lebanese farmer and firing rockets at "Zionist" (read: Israeli) tanks.

Robert Spencer, author of a book called Islam Unveiled, happened across this game and, to put it mildly, expressed some concern about it promoting ethnic violence. In response, Innovative Minds *(http://www.inminds.co.uk/islamic-fun.html)*, the British team behind Islamic Fun, updated their site with an emotional addendum, explaining that the game teaches children that "Zionism, a racist ideology, has nothing to do with Judaism." They go on to berate "some in the media" who choose to ignore "the Zionists" who "use their tanks to slaughter [Muslim] children," while targeting innocent game developers who merely want to teach kids about the Koran in a cute and colourful way.

While not expressly aimed at the littlies, there have been numerous games that may as well be due to their sheer immaturity. Following the 11 September 2001 attacks, sites like NewGrounds.com played host to a series of "revenge" games such as Osamagotchi, a gross little Flash game where you're able to have at the infamous Al-Qaeda leader with a variety of implements, including a boot, blowtorch and Bald Eagle.

Quest for Al-Qaeda and Quest for Saddam take this all one step further. They're standalone games, based on the Build and Torque engines respectively. The anti-Arab gags—which drive the whole experience—are silly and puerile. These games are just woeful.

Nonetheless, the latter managed to somewhat upset the Global Islamic Media Front, who responded by developing their own game—the afore-mentioned Night of Bush Capturing, also known as Quest for Bush. In a touch of irony, Night of Bush Capturing—with it's funky jihadist soundtrack and militant Islamic message—turned out to be a literally reskinned version of Quest for Saddam. As explained in this *(http://www.gameology.org/node/1269)* rather amusing blog entry, the Global Islamic Media Front must've thought no one would've noticed that the file names, level design and general feel of the games were identical.

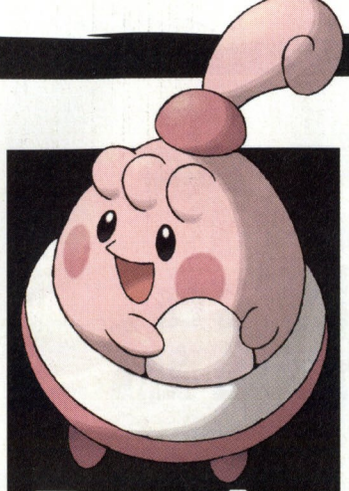


[above] Islamic Fun: Well, it's hardly The Wiggles is it?

[above] Zog's Nightmare: Nightmare by name, nightmare by nature.

DAY OF SUPREME COMMANDER KIM JONG-IL SLAUGHTERING

These games, these interactive recruitment tools, these virtual



But of course...

Not everyone has the same understanding of what a "propaganda game" is. When we spoke to Kasmiya about the Under Ash series, he tore into western games that portrayed Muslims and Arabs as evildoers. He cited Delta Force and Pandemic Studios' Full Spectrum Warrior as the worst offenders of promoting this negative stereotype.

Kasmiya isn't the only one who isn't a fan of Pandemic's work. Venezuela really isn't happy with Mercenaries 2, which tells of a fictional war in that country. The Venezuelan government claim that the White House, through a seemingly mindless action game, is attempting to garner support for a future invasion.

On a somewhat more bizarre, the Saudis banned the Pokémon games in 2001, due to their supposed glorification of gambling and Zionism. We never would've guessed that beneath his kawaii demeanour, Pikachu harboured a sinister side.

soapboxes were inevitable. Always have been, really, since gaming started to make moves towards obtaining a mass-audience way back in the days of the SNES.

Make what you will of these games and the messages they promote. Most of them are rather tacky, to say the least, and do little for either the medium or their cause, which isn't such a bad thing in the case of games like White Law and Special Force. But there are those—few and far between they may be—that are truly worthy of your time.

PeaceMaker *(http://www.peacemakergame.com/)* is a turn-based strategy game. Like Under Ash, it deals with the Israel/Palestine situation, but unlike Under Ash, it's balanced in its approach.

Taking the role of either the Israeli Prime Minister or Palestinian President, you're tasked with managing your country's day-to-day affairs and, ultimately, coming up with a peaceful solution to the conflict. It's a bloody hard game. Even on the "easiest" setting, it's unforgiving and brutal.

PeaceMaker isn't brilliant, but it's a step in the right direction. It's mature and thought-provoking. It's altruistic in its intent, but it's not afraid to show the grim reality of the situation it's based on. In short, it's everything a political game should be.

As gamers, we'd like to see more games like this—games with an actual point. And, looking at the mass-market success of films like Blood Diamond and Hotel Rwanda, we'd say we will see more games like PeaceMaker, eventually. Possibly from—ideally from, even—the big name studios.

In the meantime, though, we can expect more of the "old school" kind of political game. The Nationalist Socialist Movement's in-house studio, Swastika Arts, seems quite prolific, so no doubt there's another Zog's Nightmare on the way. The US Army has licensed Unreal Engine 3 from Epic. They're working on a version of America's Army for the Xbox 360. And Afkar Media has completed three games since the 2005 release of Under Siege. They're just waiting for a publisher. <<

[right] **Peacemaker: One of the few political games with a peaceful message.**

"[Peacemaker] is altruistic in its intent, but it's not afraid to show the grim reality"

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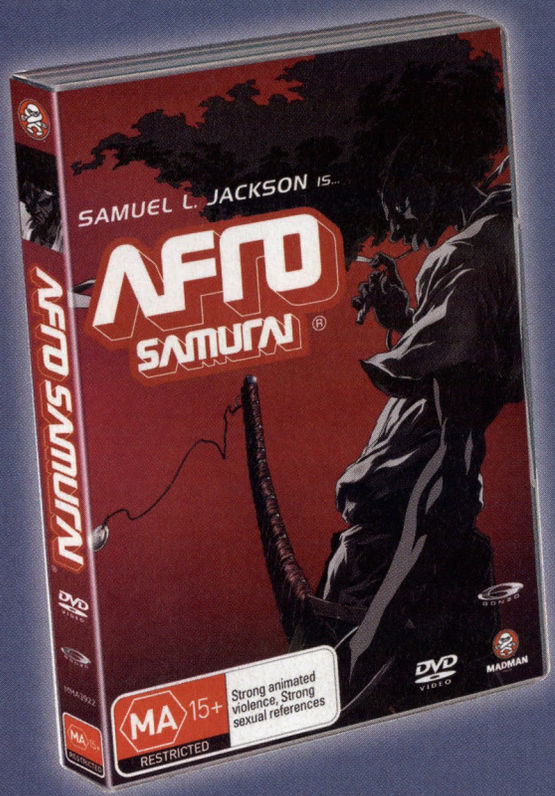

Afro Samurai is one of the biggest Anime titles of the year, telling the story of an angry lone samurai hell-bent on avenging the death of his father, an event he witnessed when he was but a lad. To celebrate the launch of Afro Samurai, Madman Entertainment has given us this rather awesome samurai-themed prize pack consisting on 17 DVDs and some Otaku Wear.

Here's what you get:

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- SAMURAI 7 VOL.1
- SAMURAI CHAMPLOO VOL.1
- RUROUNI KENSHI VOL.1
- SAMURAI GUN VOL.1
- SEVEN SAMURAI
- PRINCESS BLADE
- BICHUNMOO
- AZUMI
- ZATOICHI MEETS YOJIMBO
- ZATOICHI AT LARGE
- SAMURAI ASSASSIN
- ARAGAMI
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WAR GAMES

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

PlayStation 3 is Media Whipping Boy

In the months since I first began the War Games column I've looked at all kinds of criticisms and condemnations from within the game development community, but this month the topic at hand is focused more in the direction of those that report and comment on the videogame industry, rather than those that developer the games and hardware. This time the barbs are aimed squarely at the media, and that means us.

Ted Price, the President and CEO of Insomniac Games, the developer behind the Ratchet and Clank series and probably the PS3's finest exclusive game to date, Resistance: Fall of Man, stated in an interview with GameDailyBiz that the PlayStation 3 is not being dealt a fair hand by gaming magazines, websites and the greater media at large.

""I think the PS3 has become the whipping boy for the press, quite honestly" said Price. "I think everyone just wants to fill [the PS3] full of arrows because Sony's had some pretty amazing success over the years. It's easy to overlook that it's been, I think, the fastest selling PlayStation console. I think it's human nature to want to take down the guy on top... but it's unfortunate".

Certainly, an examination of any number of Internet newsvendors and printed magazines (providing they're not official Sony mouthpieces) will turn up plenty of scepticism and criticism of the PlayStation 3, and indeed, in some cases, there's a fair amount of whipping to be seen as well.

The real question is of course whether these criticisms are warranted, or if they amount to little more than a vindictive backlash against Sony's past successes?

We at Hyper have never made it a secret that while we love our PlayStation 3 and wholeheartedly believe that it has a bright future, there are certain aspects of Sony's recent behaviour that have displeased us to no end. If we say that the removal of the Emotion Engine from the PAL PS3 console left us disgruntled, or that the discrepancies between the Australian and American PS3 price tags leaves us feeling gypped, then it's not because we want to take Sony down a peg or two, it's because it's the truth.

Every console has its weaknesses and strengths. The Wii may be innovative, but it has a sparse software line-up, and while the Xbox 360 may have great games it has also experienced controversy in the form of its "three red lights" dilemma.

In Sony's case, it has its problems too, perhaps more than most.

"Obviously, Sony has come out and said that there are things they could have done better." Admits Ted Price. "The fact is that PS3's out there, it's sold well, and we're looking at an upcoming Christmas that should provide a lot of unique content to players, which is pretty exciting..."

We agree Ted, Christmas is looking good for the PS3, but that doesn't mean the press should handle it with kid gloves.

We don't put them on for any other console, and the PS3 should not be exempt from critical debate, regardless of Sony's amazing success in the past.

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

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up"	Starship's "We Built this City"	Dexy's Midnight Runners' "Come on Eileen"	Dead or Alive's "You Spin Me Round"	Cameo's "Word Up"	Flock of Seagulls' "I Ran"

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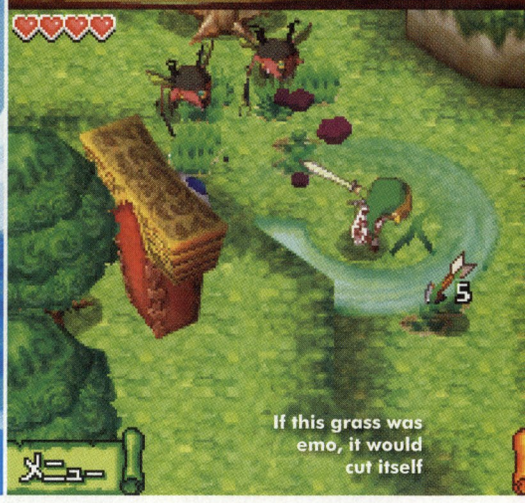
X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / **DS** / PSP



Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass [IMPORT]

JONTI DAVIES thinks it's time for a change

category: **RPG**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Nintendo**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **¥4,800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**

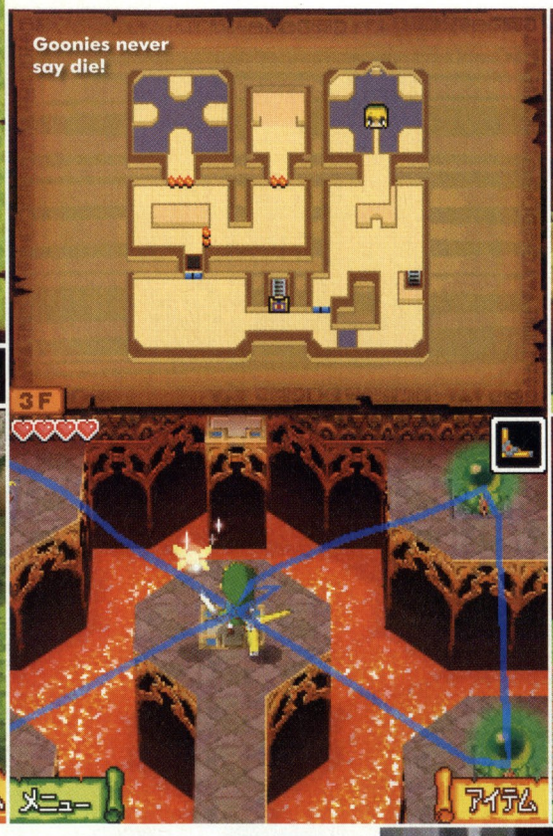
Purely because of the illustrious history of the series, which is a constellation of some of our most loved games, we tend to feel a bit anxious when playing a new Zelda title for the first time. Will it live up to its unrivalled legacy? Only very rarely have we been disappointed – Zelda II on the NES being the most notable culprit – so we'll admit that these fears are largely ungrounded. Still, there's so much at risk and we're naturally protective of things we love. You probably feel the same. So let's quickly allay any fears, then, by telling you this: we've played the Japanese version of Phantom Hourglass to completion and it's another instant classic. Anxiety Over.

To control Link with the DS' stylus is certainly a novel experience at first, but to be honest it also feels a bit strange. In order to get to grips with it and really enjoy the controls, you have to realise that Sierra (Link's fairy friend, the modern-day equivalent of Navi from Ocarina of Time) leads the way. When walking or running or jumping or whatever, you're only in direct control of Sierra – Link is just programmed to follow her movement. After about 30 minutes of forced exposure to this system (there's no d-pad control to revert to), however, it just clicks and begins to feel as natural as – if not more so than – anything from the digital, analogue or Wii Remote schools of Link control. Actions such as sword and boomerang control require no such settling-in period. To use Link's sword, all you have to do is tap on targets and Link will rush towards them and swipe. For a more powerful attack, draw a circle and Link will perform a 360-degree spin attack; scratch the stylus rapidly and Link will go in with his sword swinging from side to side, which is useful for taking out multiple enemies simultaneously. Other key items such as Link's boomerang, bombs and bow-and-arrow, once they've been equipped by tapping L or R, can be used in similarly intuitive ways. Every feature of the control system works flawlessly.

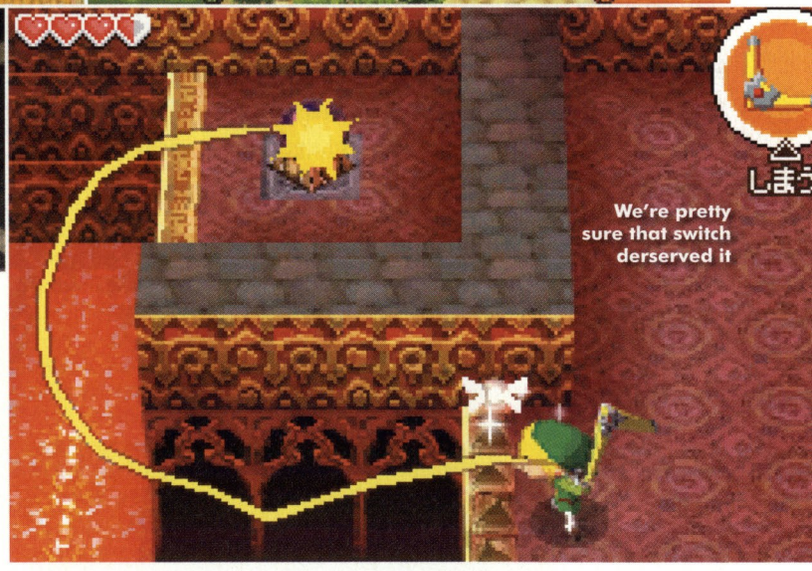
HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

With the boomerang, for example, just draw a line from Link to map the desired course of your throw. And of course it'll return to you, because boomerangs are good like that. And like everything in Phantom Hourglass, the boomerang has obvious uses as well as more subtle roles. It can be used to flick switches that would otherwise be

[below] One of the lesser known Fratelli brothers



There's no date set for a local release of Phantom Hourglass, but North America will be getting it in October. Fingers crossed that we at least get it this year...



out of reach, whereas with the first boss you'll meet – a magma-spewing hot-headed trinity (we've settled on that vague description to keep from spoiling your enjoyment) – you have to use Link's boomerang to stun said boss and then follow up with Link's sword for the kill. And before you even get to the game's first boss, you'll have had to use the boomerang to steal keys from scuttling mice as well...

It's often necessary to consider the things you can't see but which might be just around the corner. Playing Zelda on the DS is all about versatility and lateral thinking, and Phantom Hourglass fully rewards you whenever you work something out. It's not Zelda Brain Training – so there's no need to worry about Nintendo's integrity – but it will, incidentally, train your brain. The design of dungeons here is perfectly balanced between the labyrinthine Ocarina variety and Link to the Past's more directly accessible type: the overhead perspective certainly makes Phantom Hourglass feel reminiscent of SNES and Game Boy vintage Zelda dungeons, but Link's increased abilities are offset by complex, multi-storey map designs. Achieving perfect balance yet again, Nintendo has also introduced the option to make notes by writing (with the stylus) on dungeon maps. This reduces unnecessary reliance on memory and, in turn, completely gets rid of any potential cause of frustration.

When walking or running, you're only in direct control of Sierra – Link is just programmed to follow her movement.

As expected, thanks to the dedication of Nintendo's Super Mario Club of crack testers, there isn't a glitch in the game. It's smooth beyond belief. And although the visuals are raw in a PSone-standard kind of way, Phantom Hourglass (like Wind Waker) is full of character, thanks largely to the in-game characters' huge range of facial expressions. Phantom Hourglass is so easy to love; other developers could learn a lot from studying this title, because it's the perfect example of how Nintendo approaches game design: innovate, yes, but take care to remove any potential barriers between the player and the experience you want them to enjoy. This is what Phantom Hourglass does, attaching our cerebra directly to Link's world. Words cannot do this justice – Phantom Hourglass is alchemy.

SHIVER ME TIMBERS The quest here is to save a young Princess Zelda and it's played out across a number of islands, spread across four sea charts. Once more (as in Wind Waker, which is the closest relative to this game) you'll be voyaging by boat. Link's traveling companion is Captain Lineback, a patronising yet affable character, and you can plot a course across the ocean simply by drawing your desired route on a map screen. From there, a real-time journey plays out with your steamboat prone to attack from enemies on the ocean. A typical journey from one island to another takes about two minutes, during which time you'll need to fend off any attackers by engaging in some naval shoot-outs. On Link's home island of Meruka, there's a shop where you can buy and equip modifications to your vessel – the first thing you'll need is a cannon.

Perfect controls; supreme world and dungeon design

After 30 hours or so, it ends.

HYPER VERDICT

The most complete and enjoyable DS adventure Nintendo has ever made

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
93	90	97	**97**

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

Two Worlds

DANIEL WILKS is still searching for the second world

category: **RPG**
players: **1+**
developer: **Reality Pump**
publisher: **Southpeak Interactive**
price: **$89.95 (PC), $109.95 (360)**
rating: **M** / available: **Now**

Sometimes a game comes along that you desperately want to like, a game that you look at and see a mass of flaws but also see the purity of vision behind those flaws. You can see the love of the genre and the dedication that has gone into it. You can see the good ideas, the inspirations and the occasional moments of genius. And then you fall through the land or get stuck to a tree. Or you just crash to desktop. Two Worlds is one of these games. The fact that the game already has multiple patches for the European version is quite telling of how rushed the game feels but after a few hours of free roaming RPG goodness you can almost forgive the hideous number of bugs. Almost.

Players take the role of a male protagonist (there is no option to create a female character in the single player game) turned bounty hunter, forced into action when his twin sister disappears. As things always do in grand fantasy narratives (and the rather crappy ones as well), the main character get caught up in events far bigger than him, far more dangerous and far less interesting than they should be. What it all boils down to in the end is some bad people trying to resurrect a god who is not a god but some kind of god like extra-dimensional creature who may or may not be a god or some sort using a relic that the main character's family used to be protectors of or some such guff but have since broken up into five parts and scattered across the world. Naturally you need to track them down, put them together and then decide what you're going to do about this god who is not a god but really is.

YE VERILY FORSOOTH KNAVE!

Before you start to think we're making jokes about the overall incoherence of the plot, we're not. The level of the writing is quite terrible for the most part and it's delivered with such wooden voice acting that you switch off or skip the story segments before they end. The dialogue switches from modern (almost) English to forsooth verily zounds ye olde English willy-nilly in the middle of sentences and the voice actors sound about as confused as the player must invariably be. As a result the game feels more than a little disjointed when trying to play through the story quests.

Never fear though, the actual story quests in Two Worlds form only a tiny part of the overall game. There are only a dozen or so story quests in game and a lot of them simply involve going to a place and having someone talk at you for a while. The rest of the time players are free to roam the world and search out adventure on their own terms, Gothic/Oblivion style. This is where the game shines. The sense of freedom is amazing. Players can go anywhere at any time, the only impediment being that there are some remarkably tough monsters dotted around the immense map.

Character generation is just as open as the exploration. Starting with a few base skills, players can learn extra skills such as magic, alchemy, marksmanship, picking pockets or special weapon attacks from trainers dotted across the map. Skills are then leveled up by putting experience pints into them. If you find yourself sick of you character's current configuration you can pay an amount of money for a partial respect of your character in which some of the

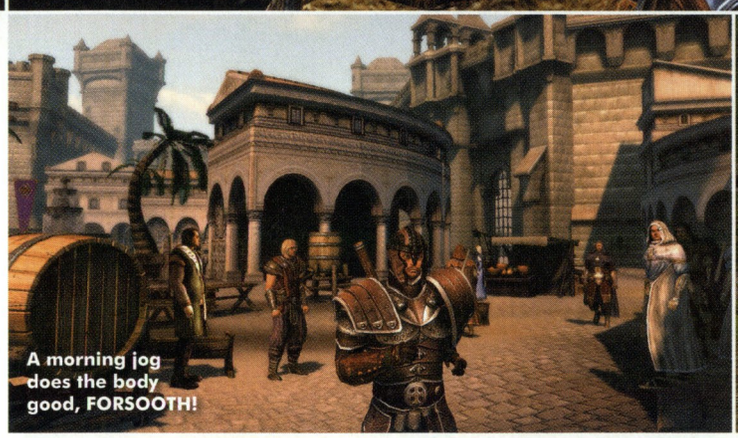
[above] VERILY every merchant is this guy's clone

[below] Ooh, shiny!

MOUNT UP Two Worlds contains mounts to facilitate fast movement across the massive game world but unless you're a glutton for punishment you'll probably ignore them after your first futile attempt at riding them. Instead of controlling via mouse look like the character, mounts are controlled solely via the WASD keys, with A and S working as an accelerator and brake respectively. It just doesn't work. To make matters worse the mount models have trouble moving up inclines, get stuck to rocks and trees and sometimes just seem to glitch out and stop dead.

Although we haven't been able to test it, Two Worlds contains a multiplayer element allowing people to team up online to tackle quests, muck around with PVP (considering the simplicity of the combat system this can't be very interesting) have mount races and the like.

You may be able to fight from horseback but don't try to ride one, KNAVE!



A morning jog does the body good, FORSOOTH!

[above] ZOUNDS! Evil tower.

points you have allocated to skills and attributes will be reimbursed so you can place them elsewhere. Nearly all of the skills are useful so chopping and changing your character skill makeup is a lot of fun. Be warned – although there is a skill to dismount mounted enemies don't waste any time putting points into it as there do not actually appear to be any mounted enemies in the game.

LITTLE FAT KIDS

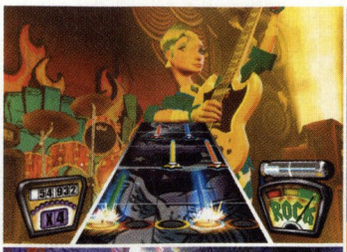
Combat is kept simple with basic mouse button mashing attacks for melee weapons, right mouse button spells and the occasional hot-keyed special move. Combat animation are quite nice for the most part but attacks with spears and polearms look more than a little stupid, making your character look more like the Star Wars kid with his broom-handle than a hardened warrior with an instrument of death. There are a good selection of weapons and armour available to customize your character. In a nice little touch that hasn't been particularly well thought through by developers, weapons or pieces of armour with the same skin can be stacked to make a superior item. Stacking two of the same type of gloves will result in a glove with higher defensive stats, stacking identical weapons will result in a weapon that does more damage. Although this is a nice feature and all but guarantees a steady increase in equipment throughout the game it can cause some balance problems; one quest saw an entire town killed by orcs and each of the town guards wielded the same weapon – 20 odd stacked katanas makes for a weapon far more powerful than anything else in the game world for a good long time.

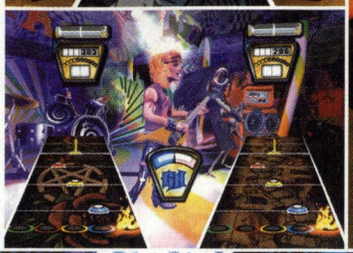
» Wandering across the game world and helping towns solve their problems through violence, Bill Bixby style.

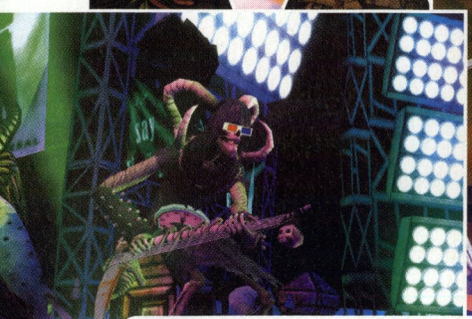
The Two Worlds graphics engine is a mix of good and atrocious. The monster design is good for the most part but none of the character or monster models appear to clip correctly, often becoming stuck on terrain or floating a few inches above the ground. Human characters are uniformly pretty ugly with special mention going to the Kira model (the main character's sister) for being especially ugly.

Two World is an odd duck of a game. As far as free roaming exploration and open ended character creation goes the design is excellent. There is a lot of fun to be had wandering across the game world, stopping off in lonely towns and helping them solve their problems through violence, Bill Bixby style. On the other hand it is painfully obvious that the game is still in beta. The code is nowhere near finished enough for final release, being full of bugs ranging from small and annoying clipping problems through to bigger problems like broken quests and crash bugs. Hopefully by the time the game finds a general release here it will be up to patch 1.5 or so. It should work almost like a finished game by then. <<

Huge map; great character creation; lots to explore	Not finished; buggy as hell; Worst. Ending. Ever.	HYPER VERDICT
Could have been great with another 4-6 months work.	VISUALS 74 / SOUND 60 / GAMEPLAY 83	65







!!! Pay attention to the lyrics of Police Truck. Censorship has managed to take a song about police corruption and brutality and turn it into a happy drinking song about driving around town. Pay special attention to the line "There's six of us so take your pick", a bit of an about face from the original "There's six of us so suck my dick".

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

Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s

DANIEL WILKS wants to rule the world

category: **Rythm**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Harmonix**
publisher: **RedOctane**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

You'd think from the Tears for Fears reference in the tag line that the classic Tears track, Everybody Wants to Rule the World would be in the line-up of songs in Guitar Hero Rocks the 80s. It's not. Neither is anything by Van Halen, Def Leppard, Kenny Loggins, A-Ha, Duran Duran, Alice Cooper, Bowie, Motley Crue, Blue Oyster Cult, The Cure, The Cult, Foreigner, INXS, AC/DC, Queen or a host of other well-known, guitar heavy and identifiably 80s bands or singers. Instead we get a playlist made up of a few classics, a few forgotten greats and a whole bunch of stuff people aren't going to be too familiar with. There is something to be said by including new, fun to play songs that aren't necessarily top of the pops in Guitar Hero but in a package like Rocks the 80s, a package that is obviously selling on the kitsch and retro value of the songs, having a track listing made up of a bunch of songs that people either haven't heard of or are considered lesser tracks by the band just comes across as a cost-cutting measure when putting together the listings rather than a conscious design choice.

Despite the costume there's no Cindi Lauper either

NOBODY LOOKS GOOD IN LEATHER PANTS

Rant out of the way there are some great classic tracks on Rocks the 80s, including the defacto 80s theme song, I Ran by Flock of Seagulls (a song about alien abduction by the way), Turning Japanese by the Vapors, Wrathchild by Iron Maiden, Police Truck by Dead Kennedys, The Warrior by Scandal, Heat of the Moment by Asia (though I defy anyone to be able to listen to it without hearing Cartman sing it to congress to get them to ratify a bill on stem cell research), Only a Lad by Oingo Boingo and Holy Diver by Dio as well as the brilliant parody track, Because it's Midnight by Limozeen, a band created for a Strongbad email. The rest of the songs really don't stack up as well with the final song, Play With Me by Extreme, a band remembered more for their rock ballads than their hard rock, ranking up there as one of the more bizarre choices. Aside from the fact that the song featured in Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure there is little to go for it. Some of the earlier tracks are harder, more fun to play and far more memorable.

The same problem that has always persisted in the Guitar Hero franchise continues to be a pain here – the divide between medium and hard is too great and the divide between hard and expert is too small but that is the lest of the game's problems. With only 30 tracks, half of them being relatively unknown, no unlockable tracks, the only one unlockable character and new skins for the main character but none of the other band members, the same venues, intros and a price tag of $70, Guitar Hero Encore Rocks the 80s comes across more as a final grab for some money before the release of Guitar Hero 3 and Rock Band rather than a game, or even an expansion pack in it's own right. <<

[below] Hey, isn't that Lion from VF2?!

I Ran, Wrathchild, Heat of the Moment

Play With Me, Balls to the Wall, Bang Your Head

HYPER VERDICT

Poor song choices hamper a great idea

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	88	83	79

So which civilization is famous for these things?

!!! The longest time someone has gone without sleep is nearly 19 days.

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

Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword

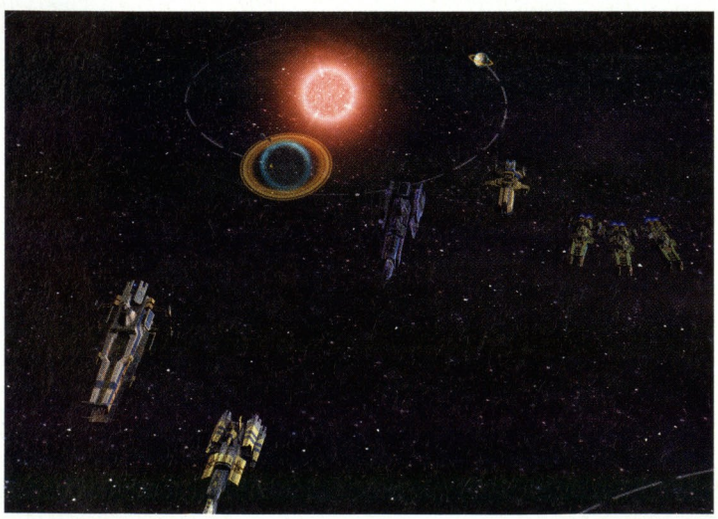
DIRK WATCH hasn't slept in a week

category: **Strategy**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Firaxis**
publisher: **2K**
price: **$49.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

My life has been stolen. I expect life to disappear when a new version of the incredible, all consuming Civ franchise comes out but so far I haven't been overly chuffed with the expansions. Not that they were bad – far from it – just that they were essentially a bunch of new scenarios for a game that already encompassed the breadth of human history. Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword isn't just a collection of scenarios, although the scenarios do play a large part in the expansion pack; it's a collection of new mechanics, rules, units, civilizations, wonders and leaders that is almost big enough to be considered Civ V.

The expansion pack is full of gameplay tweaks that genuinely improve some aspects of the game that have generally fallen off a bit as the series has expanded, such as a vastly improved espionage system and the reintroduction of random events (last seen in the original Civ). The new espionage system deserves special mention as it really does add a wonderful new element to the game. Rather than only being able to build spies after making the Scotland Yard wonder, players can now access them much earlier (as soon as they discover the Alphabet) and instead of just providing information about other civilizations and the like can be used for a whole swathe of purposes, both benign and malignant. The way espionage works is also radically different, Instead of just giving orders to spies, players must now gather "espionage points" by funneling some of their income into it, much like scientific research. These points can then be spent on different activities ranging from simple spying through to political assassinations.

[above] Star Date someting with a decimal point



FINAL FRONTIER

The space race has also been overhauled so it's no longer a case of the first person to start building a spaceship winning (most of the time anyway), as there are various ways players can speed up their steps into the great beyond or stop other players from reaching their destination; conquer the capitol and the spaceship's guidance system fails. In end game players can also now create corporations for global dominance, using economic and market pressure for conversion much like religion does in early game.

Of course there are also the scenarios. Beyond the Sword contains some of the most enjoyable scenarios we've encountered so far, ranging from WWII all the way through to the colonization of space as players search for the lost planet of Earth. There are also a few very fanciful but no less enjoyable scenarios including a war against undead on an alien planet and a society having to battle against an evil ice god and his demonic minions.

To put it simply, Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword is one of the best expansion packs we've encountered in a long while. Without reinventing the wheel, the expansion pack adds enough to an already brilliant game to totally revitalize it, stealing dozens more hours from the lives of Civ fans. Pick it up at your own risk. <<

More Civ; addictive; brilliant diplomatic additions

You still need to sleep

HYPER VERDICT

Just go and buy it

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
87	84	94	**94**

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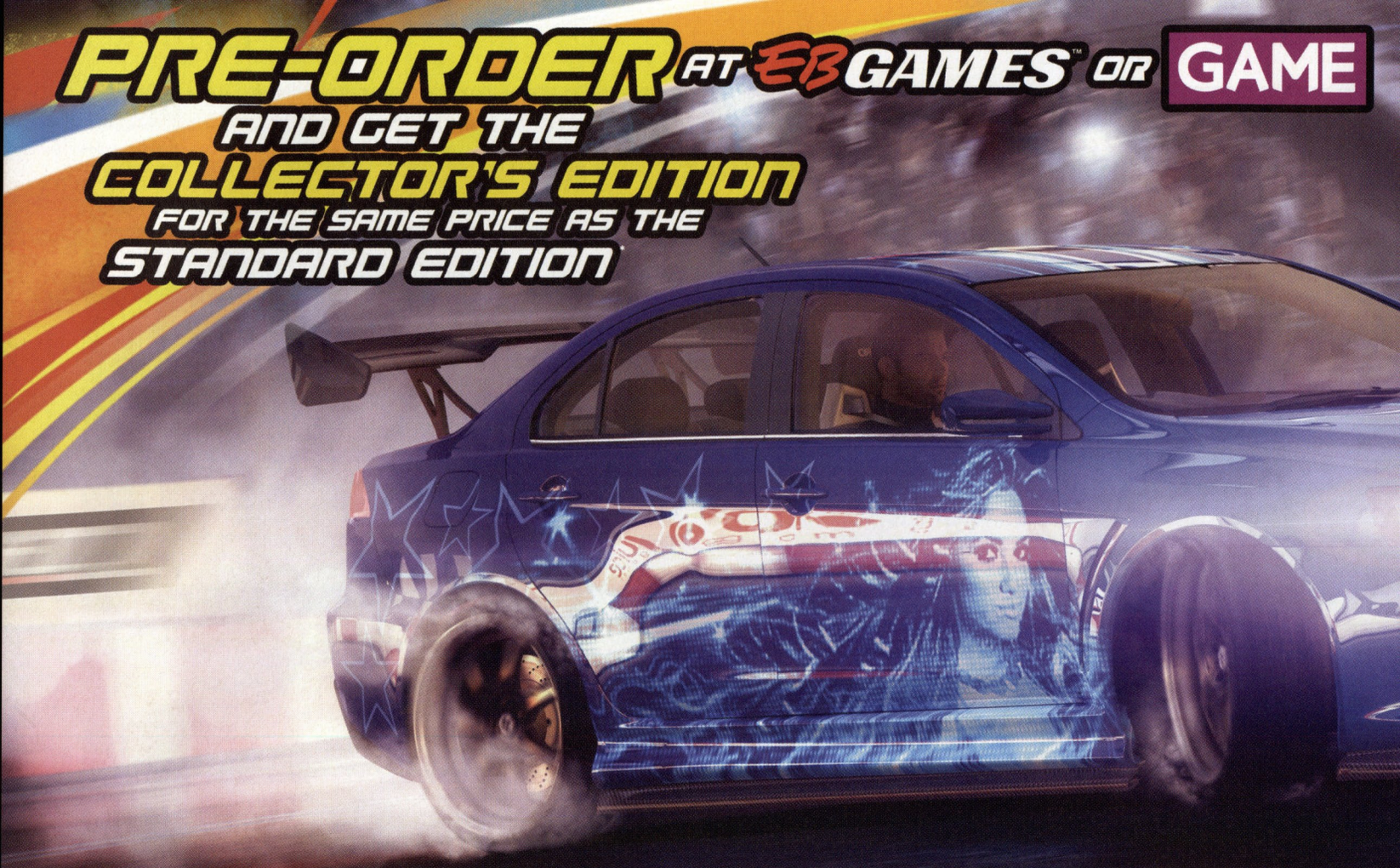
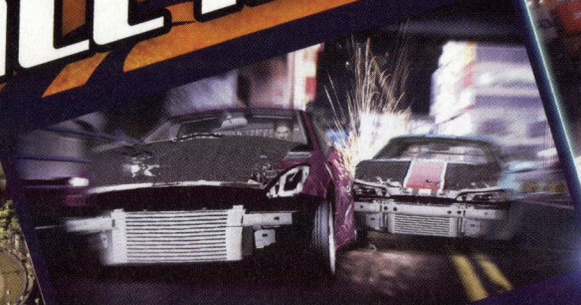


IT'S ALL ABOUT ...

THE EVENT



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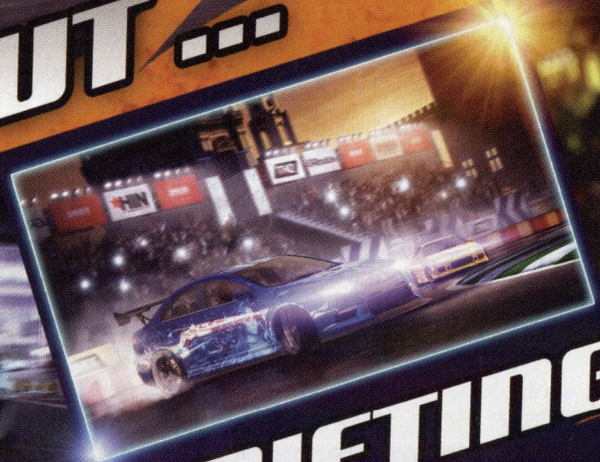

DRIFTING

R

PG Mild Gambling References

XBOX 360 LIVE

Games for Windows LIVE

PlayStation 2 PSP PlayStation Portable PLAYSTATION 3

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NINTENDO DS.
THQ
WWW.THQ.COM.AU
JUICED2HIN.COM

!!! Apparently the aforementioned "generic rock" bands featured in the game include The Sleeping, Riverboat Gamblers. Kazzer, The White Heat, A Static Lullaby and This is Menace... yeah, we didn't think you'd have heard of them.

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

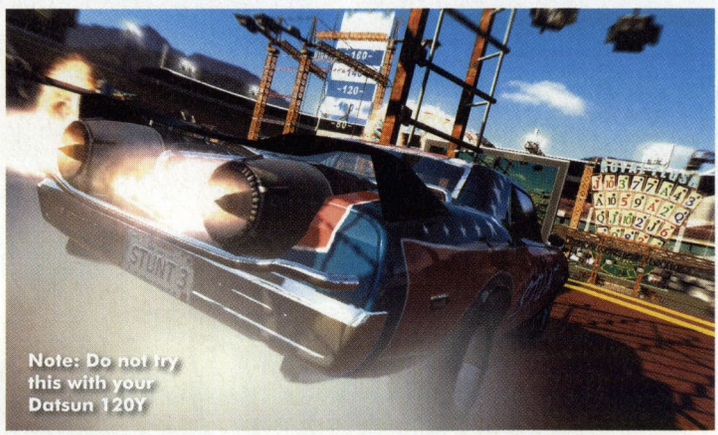
FlatOut: Ultimate Carnage

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE is a remake too

category: **Action**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Bugbear Entertainment**
publisher: **Activision**
price: **$49.95** / rating: **MA15+**
available: **Now**

It may not yet be considered in the same calibre as the Burnout series, but the similarly themed FlatOut franchise has proven to be a consistently excellent series of games, with each outing providing more racing, crashing, environmental destruction and zany mini-games than the last.

While it is essentially just a reworking of FlatOut 2 with improved visuals, and a few new gameplay tweaks and modes, FlatOut: Ultimate Carnage is still the best the FlatOut franchise has ever been. Given the high quality of the previous the two games that is definitely saying something.



Note: Do not try this with your Datsun 120Y

DESTROY THEM!

The differences between Ultimate Carnage and its predecessor are immediately obvious. The graphics are significantly better than anything seen in the FlatOut series to date, as well they should be. The cars and environments are now more detailed, with developer Bugbear Entertainment boasting that they have almost tripled the amount of polygons on screen, with as many as 20,000 in each car. Whatever the number, it shows.

On the gameplay side everything from the original FlatOut 2 has made it across, and a few bonuses besides. There is of course the standard FlatOut mode, and the new Carnage career modes. FlatOut mode is all about driving fast, crashing hard and being the first across the finish line. In this respect Ultimate Carnage improves over FlatOut 2 by allowing twelve competitors to crowd the track where there was once only eight, making for more hectic, disaster-packed races.

These damage effects are another of the game's most noticeable upgrades. Now when you hit wooden fence, it shatters into splinters, with debris sticking to the hood of your car as you drive off into another obstacle. When you crash into another car they'll flip, tumble or even explode in a shower of spare parts. When you hit supporting beams on a sign post or a poorly constructed barn, the entire structure falls down, and when you crash into a petrol station, the entire station and everything within a fifteen-metre radius goes up in a ball of flames. It all looks far more impressive this time out, and small details like tyre marks left in the dirt, or dust particles settling after a particularly violent crash all make it that much more impressive.

The new Carnage career mode is a bit more innovative, and involves a succession of races, destruction-derbies and a variety of unusual mini-games that have become synonymous with the franchise. Most of these games involve launching your driver out of the car's windscreen, sending him sailing through the air into a variety of targets including giant dart boards, baseball bats, basketball hoops and soccer goals. Unfortunately, while there are a few new bonus mini-games to play, there are no new tracks, somewhat squandering the opportunity to make Ultimate Carnage appeal to both new and old FlatOut players.

The music is another missed opportunity, with none of the awesome songs featured in FlatOut 2 (which included Fall Out Boy, Wolfmother and more) making it across. Instead the soundtrack is packed full of generic rock that begins to grate from about the second race onwards. The load times too could have used more effort, as they'll leave you waiting quite awhile before letting you get into the action.

Because it's a remake, we can't wholeheartedly recommend anyone who has already fronted up the cash for a copy of FlatOut 2 to do so again for Ultimate Carnage. Nevertheless, Ultimate Carnage is definitely the best yet in the FlatOut series. <<

Looks and plays better than ever before.

The soundtrack sucks, load times are too long, it's a remake.

HYPER VERDICT

Ultimate Carnage makes us want FlatOut 3 even more.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	66	89	80

Autobots versus Go-Bots... it's gonna be ugly.

!!! Probably the coolest thing about Transformers: The Game is that you can unlock a few designs for your bots that will turn them into the original Generation 1 Transformers! Alternate models for Optimus Prime, Megatron, Jazz, Starscream and more are all included, and they look about a million times better than their movie-inspired likenesses.

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

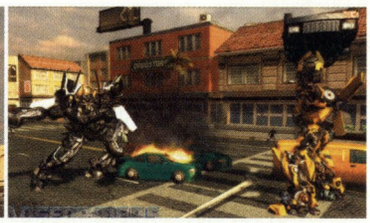
Transformers: The Game

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE has the touch!

category: **Action**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Traveler's Tales**
publisher: **Activision**
price: **Xbox 360, PS3: $109.95, Wii: $99.95, PC: $49.95, PS2: $79.95, DS: $69.95, PSP: $59.95**
rating: **G** / available: **Now**

If you've already seen Michael Bay's film based on the 1980's cartoon series, which was in turn based upon Hasbro's line of toys, then you'll already know that it's the kind of guilty pleasure that's a lot of fun, even though it's complete rubbish.

It's the kind of film you go into, switch your brain off, forget that films are supposed to have credible, coherent stories or likable, fleshed-out characters, and simply stuff your face full of popcorn and enjoy the spectacle of giant robots beating the shit out of each other... and that's pretty much the same way I feel about Transformers: The Game.



GRAND THEFT AUTOBOT

First lets look at the things that Transformers: The Game gets right. Developer Traveller's Tales, fresh from their success with the LEGO Star Wars series, have done a very solid job at translating Michael Bay's directorial excesses into a videogame.

The playable Autobots include the likes of Bumblebee, Jazz, Ironhide and of course, Optimus Prime, while on the Decepticon side you get to play as Megatron, Starscream, Blackout, Barricade and Skorponok. Each robot looks strikingly close to their cinematic counterparts (or, at least they do in the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions), and all are highly detailed and dynamically animated in ways that really sell to you that they are actually giant alien robots. The transforming animations are particularly good, even though they do lack the awesome "transformation sound" from the original series.

All Spark? Who thinks up this rubbish?

When you actually drop into the game world you get another pleasant surprise. Each level is a large open-world environment and you are free to roam them as you please, destroying buildings, tanks, cars, planes, helicopters and generally anything within eyeshot with you monstrous giant robot. Better yet, when you get tired of destruction, you can always just transform into your alternate form and drive or fly to a place in the level you haven't destroyed yet.

It's almost like a Transformers edition of Grand Theft Auto (or "Grand Theft Autobot" as we have taken to calling it), only instead of having to steal a vehicle from an innocent civilian — you are the vehicle.

Unfortunately, the game is far from consistent. The problem is that to progress throughout the game you have to do missions, and these missions are dull, repetitive and a chore to play. With an endless supply of checkpoint races and kill quests, it's almost as if you have to stop having fun just to propel the story forward.

Most disappointingly is that the combat in Transformers doesn't even come close to being as cool as giant robot fighting should be.

Brawling is the only technique required to defeat an endless parade of nameless, faceless robots (or "genericons" as we call them). When you do get to a boss you don't even get to use your super sweet Cybertronian weapons, since all the big-name Transformers are impervious to gunfire, leaving you to lob cars, fences, trees and other debris at them until they drop their defences and you can punch them. This tactic is used for almost every Autobot or Decepticon boss character, and unsurprisingly, it's dull.

All up, Transformers is like half a good game. If you only want to spend your time exploring the city, and destroying it, then you'll have fun. The story missions and combat just needed far more effort. <<

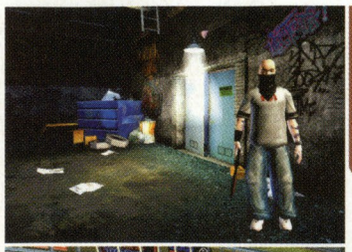
Looks good, exploration and destruction is fun.

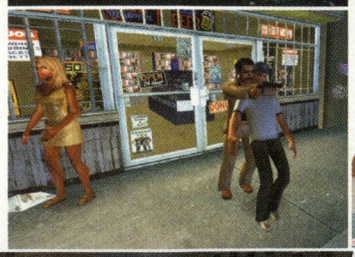
Mission objectives are repetitive and boring, combat is poor.

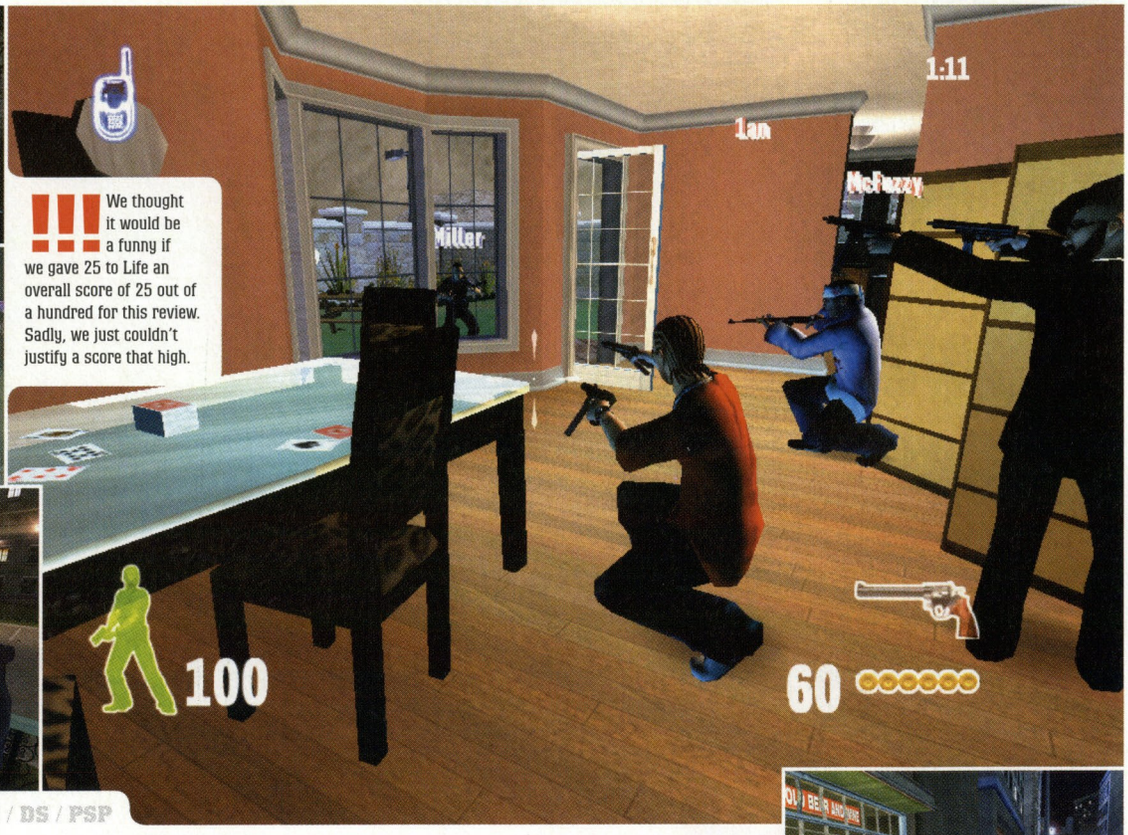
HYPER VERDICT

Less than meets the eye.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	84	69	**69**







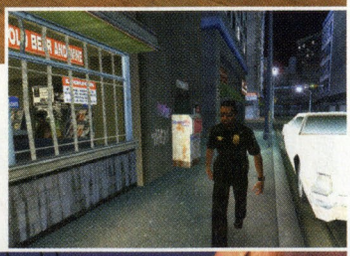
!!! We thought it would be a funny if we gave 25 to Life an overall score of 25 out of a hundred for this review. Sadly, we just couldn't justify a score that high.

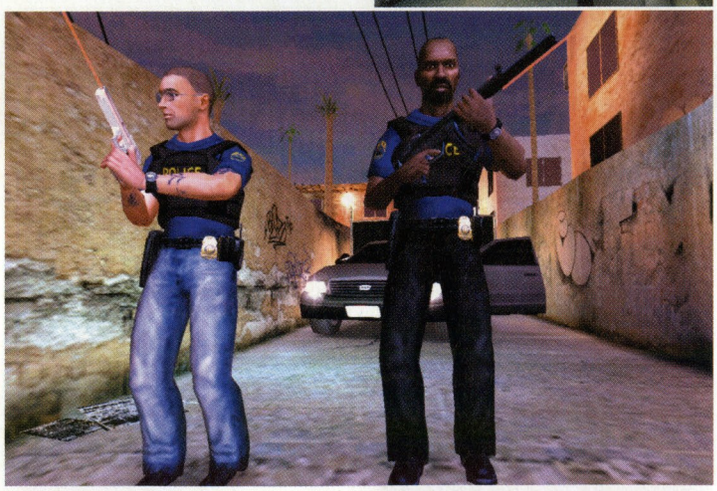
X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / DS / PSP

25 to Life

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE IS the streets.

category: **Action**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Avalanche Software**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$49.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **TBA**





[above] Murtaugh and Riggs they ain't

If there was ever a game that we needed to save you from, it's this one dear readers. You may remember hearing about 25 to Life in mid 2004. The game was originally meant to ship in early 2005, and it was said to be set firmly in the mould of Grand Theft Auto. Two years later and the game finally released in the United States, but it would take another year before it would make its way to Australia.

Believe us though, we'd have been far better off if it never got released at all...

I HATE THIS GAME

Let's set one thing straight right off the bat: despite what you may have heard in the past, 25 to Life is not a Grand Theft Auto clone. To be rightly classed as a GTA clone it would have to possess a seamless open-world, a credible storyline, believable characters, a variety of different gameplay styles and most importantly, it would have to be fun. This game has none of that.

Putting you in the role of Andre "Freeze" Francis, 25 to Life tells the story of a gang-banger trying to go straight, and what's the best way to go straight? Killing cops of course! If you'd rather shoot African-American males, however, the game also has you covered, since throughout the story mode you'll get to control a cop, Detective Lester Williams. Regardless of which side you're on, the game is essentially the same: trudge through a variety of dull urban environments capping a variety of dim gangstas and/or police officers.

The game looks absolutely awful, and is far below par even for the aging PS2. The level design is ghetto-by-numbers, the palette is muddy, the characters are poorly crafted and the entire world is rendered in a blurry and indistinct style (despite what the screenshots may suggest).

The game's combat too is hopelessly unbalanced. Hitting someone with a baseball bat will kill them instantly, while shooting them takes so many bullets that they border on being invincible. Your average police officer, for example, can take about to three or four bullets to the face before going down.

In stark contrast, your own health supply is frustratingly limited, with just a few flesh wounds being enough to send you to the grave. When you realise that an enemy you just capped three times in the skull is not only still alive, but has just killed you and is now corpse-humping your dead body — you will throw not only your controller, but your entire console out the window.

To cap off the game's inadequacies is the sheer irrationality of the enemy AI. Throughout the game you will have to take innocent civilians hostage, at gunpoint, and use them as human shields. Unfortunately, both for you and the civilian, your enemies don't much care about preserving human life, and will blissfully shotgun your hostage to death before doing the same to you. Why include a feature if it has absolutely no effect Avalanche Software? TELL ME PLEASE, I WANT TO KNOW!

Depending on your musical taste, the game's selection of hip hop tunes will either be its best feature, or just yet another soundtrack filled with dudes rapping about how rich they are and how many "bitches" they slapped today. Unfortunately that is the only thing that can be salvaged from this train wreck of a game. If you're stupid enough to buy it, then you deserve the agony of playing it. Word. <<

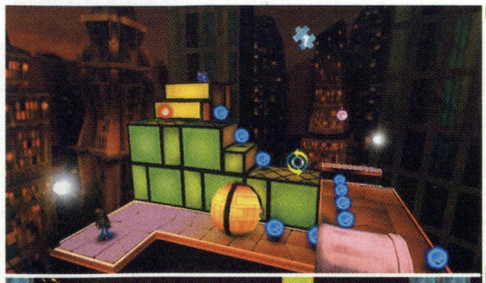
If you like rap, I guess the soundtrack is okay.

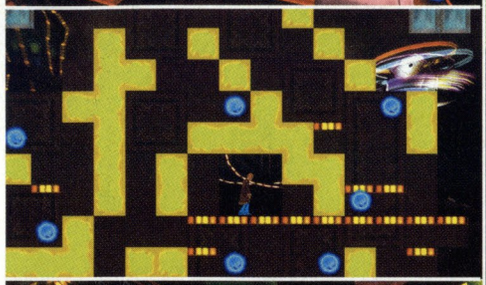
Absolute unadulterated bullshit.

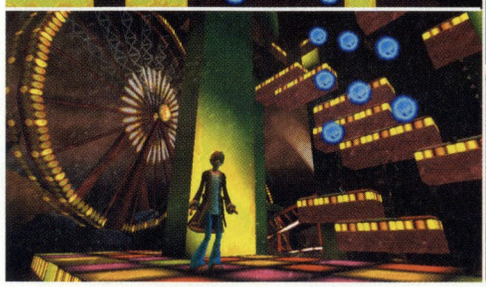
HYPER VERDICT

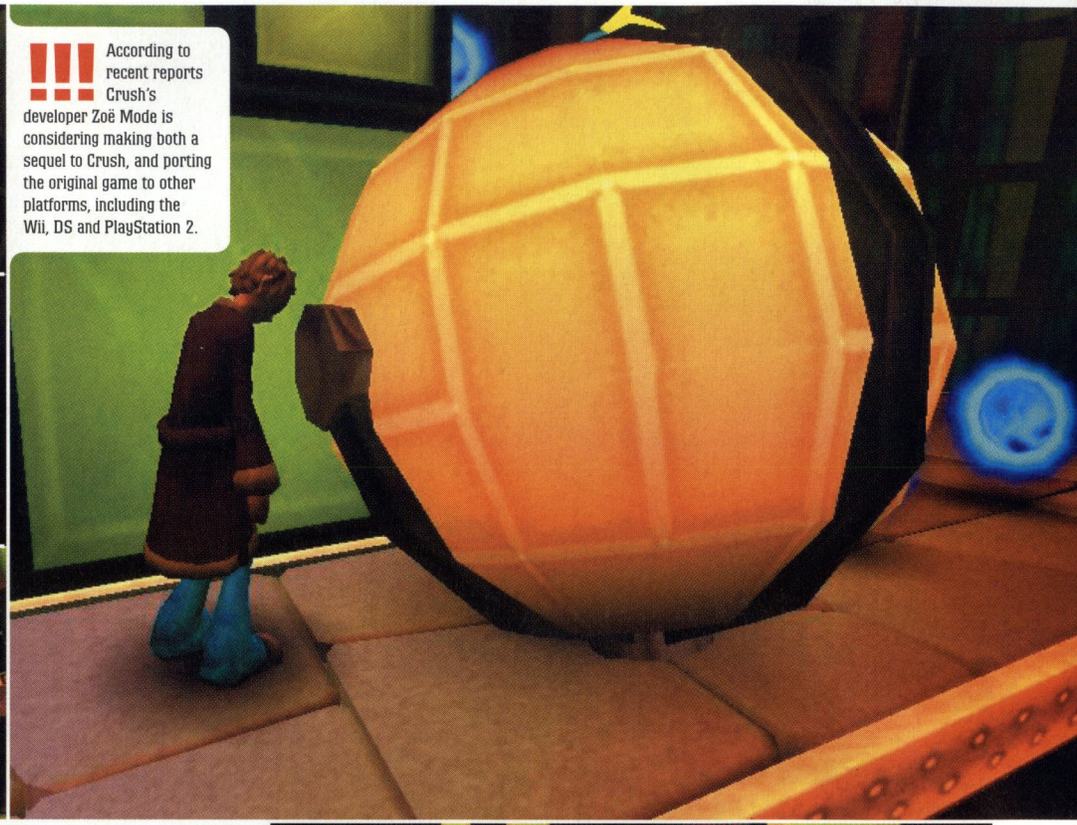
25 to Life IS awful.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
29	63	19	**19**









!!! According to recent reports Crush's developer Zoë Mode is considering making both a sequel to Crush, and porting the original game to other platforms, including the Wii, DS and PlayStation 2.

Crush

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE has a crush on this game

It's not often that we encounter a game that is both completely original in its concept and rock-solid in its execution, but that is what we have in Crush.

Combining elements of the puzzle and platform genres, and taking place in both three and two dimensions, Crush contains many familiar elements, yet uses them in ways we've never seen before seen, making Crush one PSP puzzle game to get excited about.

CRAZY CRACKPOT CRUSHENATING

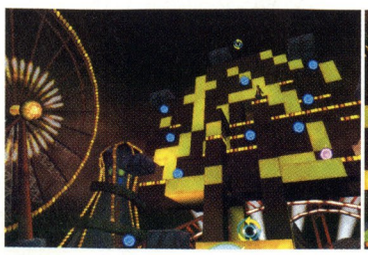
In Crush you play Danny, a hopeless insomniac who hasn't slept a wink in years. To help him with his problem he's tracked down a slightly eccentric doctor, named Dr. Reubens, whose got just the kind of crackpot cure that makes for a great game set-up. To cure his ills Danny has to enter into Dr. Reubens' specially designed virtual reality system called C.R.U.S.H. (which is apparently an acronym of Cognitive Regression Utilising Psychiatric Heuristics... even though that makes C.R.U.P.H.).

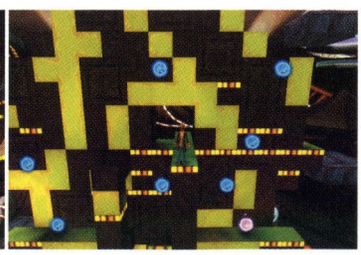
When you are first dropped into C.R.U.S.H. the world is in 3D and is made out of many floating blocks with ledges, steps, slopes and other landscaping features. Some areas will be immediately accessible, while others will be out of reach, and that is where dimensional switching, or "crushing" comes into play.

With a press of the L button the entire world crushes down into a single plane, with blocks that may have been in the background or foreground merging together to form one unbroken level.

What's more, the camera angle can be switched to face north, south, east or west and can even be moved into a top-down perspective, with each camera angle producing a different landscape when the level is crushed into 2D, opening up many previously inaccessible ledges. It may sound brain-meltingly complicated, but it's not. What it is, however, is fun.

[below] Before and After: Crushing a 3D level flat.





[above] This reminds me of that other time I did shrooms

category: **Puzzle**
players: **1**
developer: **Zoë Mode**
publisher: **SEGA**
price: **$79.95** / rating: **G**
available: **Now**

The overall aim of all this dimension-crushing is to collect Danny's lost marbles, helping him get to the bottom of the deep-seeded trauma that's causing his insomnia. Collect enough marbles and the level's exit will open up, letting you move on to the next area. The real fun, though, comes from trying to collect everything in the level, including the hidden puzzle pieces (which unlocks a gallery of production art) and the secret trophies (which unlocks a time-trial mode for each level).

With forty levels split evenly between four chapters based on locations like the beach, the city and a fun fair, Crush begins easy but quickly escalates in difficulty becoming extremely challenging towards the later levels in each chapter. Each chapter also brings with it a variety of new gameplay devices, including disappearing ledges, or blocks that are only visible in certain dimensions, which can dramatically change the way you solve the game's puzzles

For anyone who can wrap their head around a few dimensional changes and likes puzzle games, Crush is easily one of the best in the genre for Sony's handheld. <<

Unique premise, fun puzzle/platform gameplay.

We wouldn't have said no to a few more levels.

HYPER VERDICT

Fresh ideas are awesome.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
76	72	90	**89**

!!! The PS3 version of the game also utilises motion control but trying to use the Sixaxis as a wand feels unnatural.

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

Harry Potter & the Order of the Phoenix

DANIEL WILKS strengthens his wrist

Harry Potter on the Wii is an absolute no brainer. The two go together like...well...two things that go together really well. It's just natural to have the Wiimote act as a wand, waving it in certain patterns to evoke certain spells. Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, the game based on the movie based on the fifth book in the famous series may be the first game in the franchise to appear on the Wii but if it's an indication of the direction the series is headed on the Nintendo console then we can expect two more good games.

Casting spells with the Wiimote isn't the easiest thing in the world to begin with, and neither is it the most accurate, but the simple act of swinging around a wand instead of simply moving a thumbstick makes the Wii version of the game the best of the bunch. Although it takes a while to get used to the wrist actions required to cast spells – the actions themselves aren't difficult but doing them consistently and accurately can be a little testing – the implementation of the motion based spell casting is very clever. To stop players from having to learn dozens of different hand movements for different spells, the same motions have different applications depending on the context.

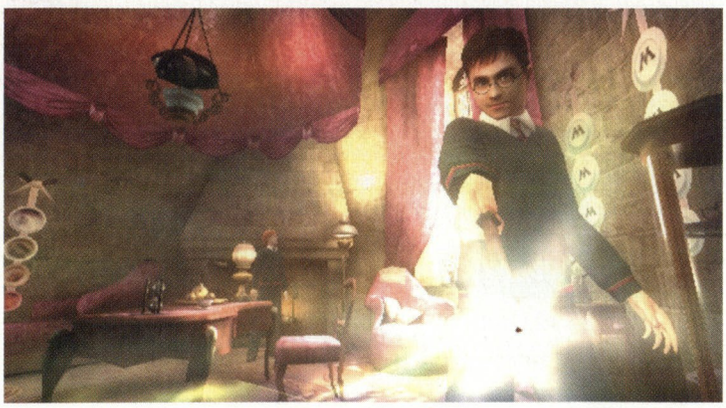
TAKING UMBRIDGE

Order of the Phoenix is a little weaker than the previous Harry Potter games as far as the game narrative goes as players have to form Dumbledore's Army by completing numerous quests around the school. Most of the quests boil down to the same few things – going somewhere to collect something, finding a number of something or completing a simple task – so the storyline doesn't really have a lot of impact. Exploration, on the other hand, is a blast. Wandering around Hogwarts, exploring and using spells to solve simple puzzles and fix parts of the school that have been broken by Dolores Umbridge is a blast and will likely occupy players far longer than the story line, especially considering that there is a free play mode unlocked after completing the main story that allows players to look around all they want.

Even more so than previous iterations of the franchise, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix is a game built for fans of the book. Nearly everything in Hogwarts is interactive in some way and playing around with these interactions can lead to "discoveries" which in tern lead to numerous unlockables such as behind the scenes videos and interviews with the stars of the series.

There are, of course, problems with the game. The waypoint system in the game is sketchy at best and quite often leads the player on a very long road to their destination and some of the quests to find people or objects can be a real pain in the arse as they are not indicated on the map forcing players to wander rather aimlessly until they stumble upon them. Even with the problems, however, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix remains a fun game and probably the best in the franchise to date. We're looking forward to seeing what the franchise has in store for us next. <<

[above] Gary Oldman? Surely you can't be Sirius...



category: **Action/Adventure**
players: **1**
developer: **EA**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

Wii-Wand; exploration; looks great

Repetitive quests; poor waypoints

HYPER VERDICT

A great leap in the series

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
86	82	83	**80**

GAME

The next level

Careers at GAME

Nimble mind going numb? Get into GAME!

On the 19th September 2006 GAME acquired The Games Wizards (TGW) and now we are going **National** with stores opening in SA, WA, QLD, TAS, NT and more in NSW & Victoria.

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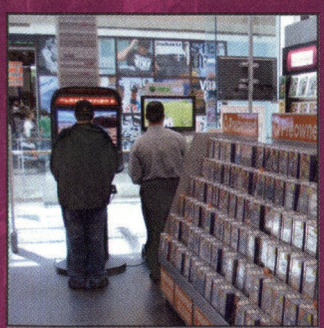

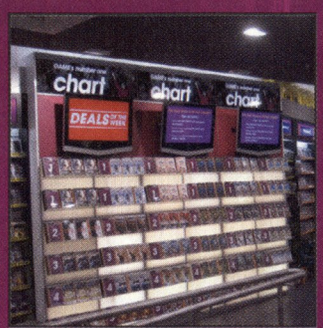

INTO GAMES, GET INTO GAME

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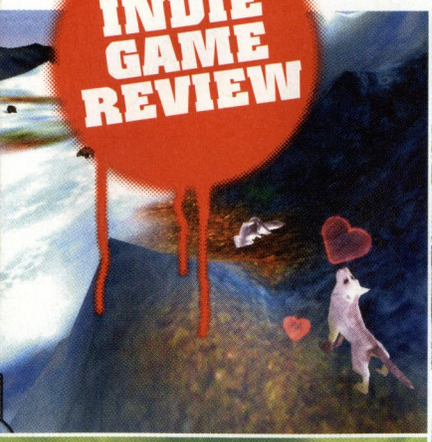
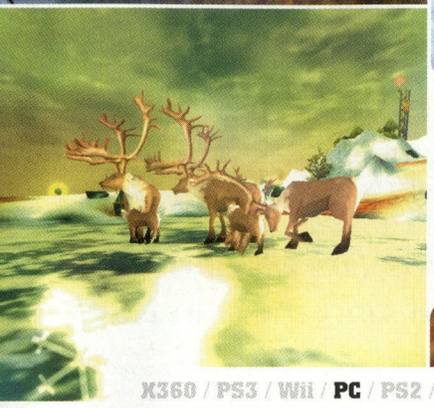
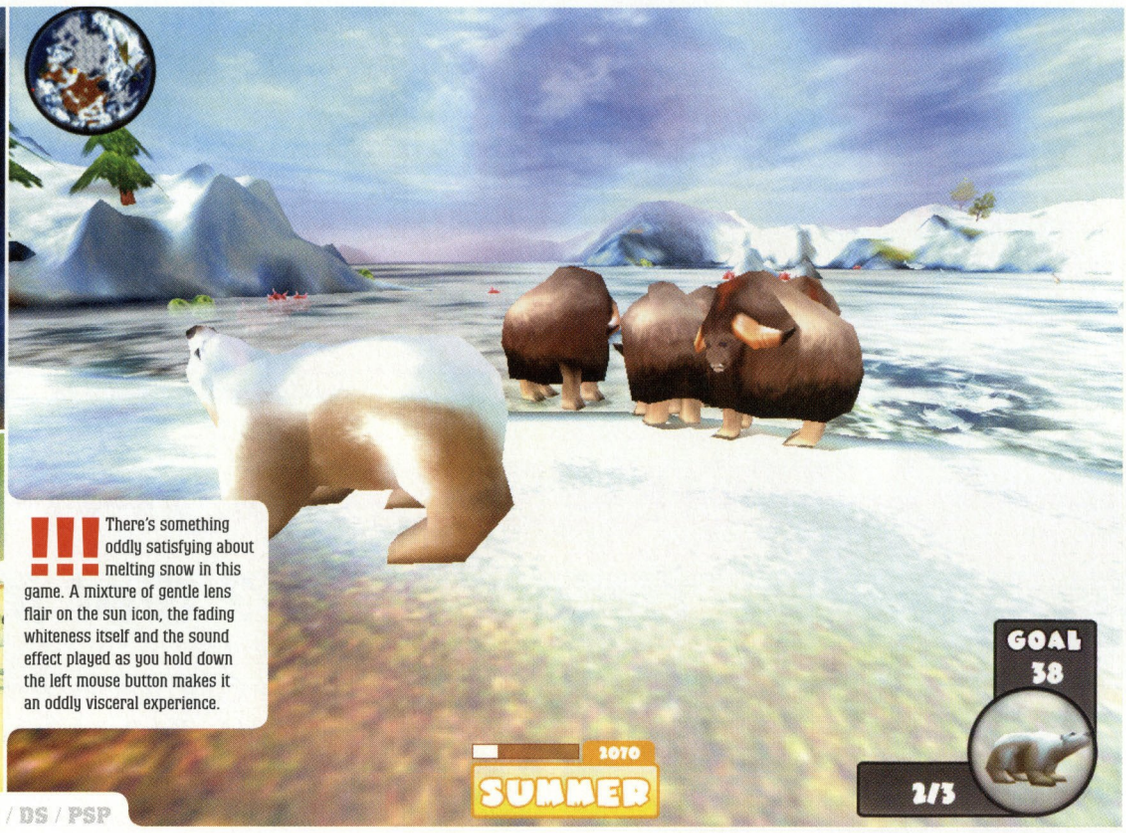
NEW STORES OPENING SOON AUSTRALIA WIDE!

INDIE GAME REVIEW







!!! There's something oddly satisfying about melting snow in this game. A mixture of gentle lens flair on the sun icon, the fading whiteness itself and the sound effect played as you hold down the left mouse button makes it an oddly visceral experience.

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

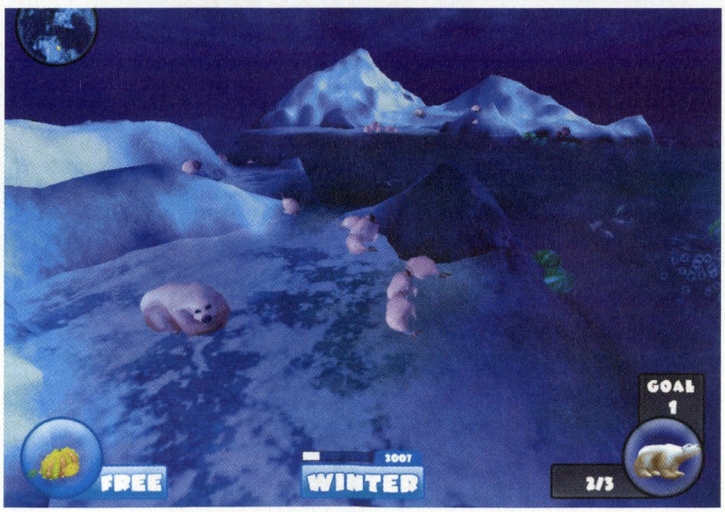
Wildlife Tycoon 2: Venture Arctic

TIM HENDERSON hates London weather

category: **Sim**
players: **1**
developer: **Pocketwatch Games**
publisher: **Pocketwatch Games**
price: **US $23.50** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now**

There's a reason why Mother Earth is a concept rather than an actual person, and that reason is that maintaining an eco system is simply too much to handle. Indeed, human beings as a collective group have done more to fuck such things up than anything else; it's therefore difficult to imagine but one woman (or man, to be even-handed) having control over and entire eco-system and not botching everything up. Damn straight, really, as Wildlife Tycoon: Venture Arctic proves that managing even a couple of islands and animals that generally only number in their tens can be more than enough to keep your hands full.

[below] Not pictured: giant magnifying glass melting ice



SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN, WINTER AND SPRING

It's all about the oft touted circle-of-life, really. Nature's own vicious cycle providing a very fitting readymade template for which to base a strategic God game. That very drive so commonly nurtured by that birds-eye perspective – the desire to keep all of your 'units' alive, will here inevitably result in death. Players will be forced to show tough love of the cruelest sort, frequently taking life so than new life can continue to thrive and flourish.

This is represented most clearly by the Venture Arctic's seasonal structure, which works as a highly efficient gameplay organiser. Spring makes shrubs and love free, so that you can prepare your population for the harsh times ahead; but summer will come first, and with it players can control the sun to melt snow to reveal moist soil sprouting fresh grass below; then autumn brings in a little more cold, beneficial for feeding the sea, but likely to make your typical mammal ill; winter brings with it snow, and death from autumn's disease, but if you don't lay snow, grass won't grow, and if no animals die then overpopulation will deplete food reserves.

As it is, winter is very much a season for harvesting spirits. These colour-coded, floating orbs born from life lost work as the game's currency, used to purchase and unlock different animals by theme. This also extends to seasonal effects, as snow can also be laid during the summer months, but it will cost you whereas it's free to use during winter itself.

Venture Artic is sequel to an African cousin, but ironically it may actually be a little less impressive to look at. The vibrant colours and changing lighting conditions are not unwelcome, but there's no doubt that many will find them garish. Animals also seem less impressive up close, but this may be because the game is best played from a more practical, zoomed-out angle. In every other regard, also, it's its cousin's superior: management of animal populations is less precise and more bearable, seasonal effects add equal elements of chaos and control (and can be played in fast forward should you have done all you need for a time), and the harvesting of souls ensures that a degree of balance can always be maintained. It's not perfect, but it will also remind you that you're not perfect either, and provide a sufficiently engrossing challenge at the same time. <<

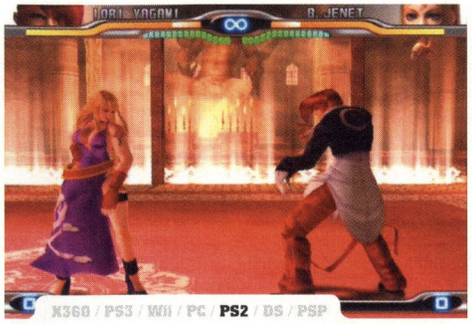
Simple interface. Great life and death balance

Tutorial a little vague. No camera rotation

HYPER VERDICT

Maintaining nature can be a bitch – it's just as well this is only a game.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
73	81	84	**82**



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

King of Fighters: Maximum Impact 2

category: **3D Fighter**
players: **1-2**
developer: **SNK Playmore**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$69.95**
rating: **TBA**
available: **Now**

I loves me some 2D fighters, which is a good thing, because despite its attempt at looking like a 3D game, King of Fighters: Maximum Impact 2 isn't. Just like its predecessor KOF: MI2 transports all your favourite King of Fighters characters, including Terry Bogard, Kyo, Iori, Kim, Mai and a buttload more into the third dimension whilst retaining pretty much all the gameplay of a traditional 2D instalment in the series.

Sounds great? Well, it is and it isn't. While it's built on a solid premise, KOF: MI2 squanders the opportunities offered by that third dimension. There are a few tacked-on combo strings and a dodge move, but overall it's a pretty ordinary job, and far less polished than SNK's usual standard at that.

The visuals are decidedly old school, even for a PS2 game, and while the character designs, animations and the special effects are well done, it's not a patch on Soul Calibur III. The audio too isn't ideal, with a near-constant torrent of inane quips being delivered by the fighters, in some pretty irritating and badly-acted sound bites.

To put it bluntly, King of Fighters: Maximum Impact 2 isn't SNK's finest hour. It feels dated, and in terms of gameplay it certainly doesn't attempt to differentiate itself enough from the company's line of 2D fighters to make it a truly good in 3D. If you love 2D fighters, as I do, you'll still find something to like in KOF: MI2, even if it is just seeing your favourite SNK characters get a Z-axis, but ultimately I'd rather play KOF XI than this.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
60	65	70	68

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

Monster Hunter Freedom 2

category: **Action RPG**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Capcom**
publisher: **Capcom**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **M**
available: **September 12**

To be honest, Monster Hunter Freedom 2 isn't much of a departure from Monster Hunter Freedom. There is a lot of overlap between the two games – certain maps and monsters make a return as do all of the core monster hunting mechanics. What Monster Hunter Freedom 2 is, is a wonderful updating of the game, adding a few new elements and tweaking the crossover to make a much more enjoyable and user friendly game than the original. The concept remains simple; as far as the plot goes, one day your character is out hunting and is knocked off a cliff by a giant monster. You wake in a village and take hunting jobs there. Not exactly Hemmingway but the plot serves the purpose and honestly, in a game called Monster Hunter you pretty much know what you're in for from the title. In case you missed it, you hunt monsters.

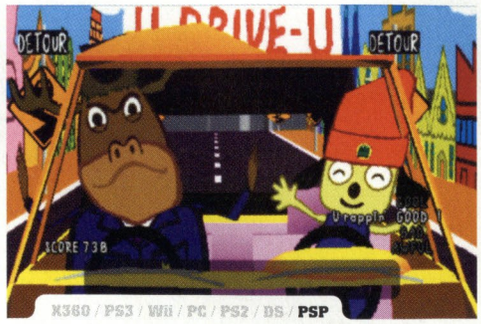
Fighting mechanics remain identical to the first game – the weapon you have equipped determines the type and strength of attack you can make and what defenses you have available; a light sword may not do much damage but it can combo and block whilst a heavy lance does a lot of damage in one hit but only allows the player to dodge rather than dodge and block. Timing is the key to combat.

Whilst that may not have changed, loading times have been vastly improved as has the ability to create and modify weapons and armour. A new day/night cycle makes for more variation in maps (some areas are only unlocked at the right time of day) and a few new weapons such as the Gun-Lance, Hunter's Flute (a club that doubles as an instrument) and Tachi add more depth to the combat. Good hunting.

RICO SUAVEZ

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
90	80	84	84



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

PaRappa The Rapper

category: **Rhythm**
players: **1**
developer: **SCE Japan Studio**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$49.95**
rating: **G**
available: **TBA**

It's been more than ten years since Masaya Matsuura's PaRappa the Rapper kick-started the rhythm genre on the original PlayStation. The game's mixture of catchy tunes, cute and crazy characters designed by renowned pop artist Rodney A. Greenblat, as well as a then-new form of gameplay that involved pressing buttons in time with the music made it an instant classic.

Apart from a slight increase in resolution and aspect ratio to fit the PSP's screen, everything we loved about the game the first time around remains unchanged. The original six levels including the zany "kick-punch, it's all in the mind" of Onionhead, a driving lesson from a moose and a cooking lesson from a chicken still bring a smiles to our lips all these years later.

It's been over a decade since this game debuted, and in that time the rhythm genre has long since left PaRappa behind. Games like Elite Beat Agents/Ouendan and peripheral-based games like Guitar Hero and Donkey Konga have really spoiled us, and as a result, PaRappa no longer seems as fun as it once did.

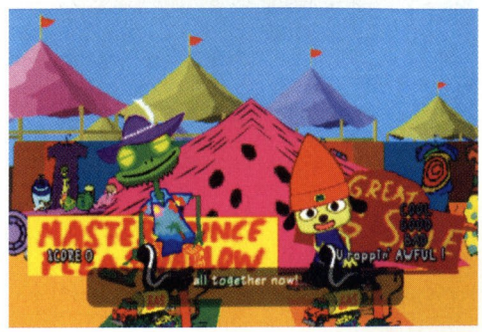
The songs are both simplistic, and yet, because of the game's very finicky key press registration, you will often not be credited for notes that you swore you hit perfectly, which can be extremely frustrating.

In addition, the six levels are not really enough to make PaRappa the Rapper worth the asking price. Sony would have been far better off releasing this game as part of a compilation that collected both this, PaRappa 2 and its spin-off Um Jammer Lammy. As it stands, however, PaRappa just feels like a badly aged and unnecessary re-release.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	89	58	58



Xbox Live, PS3 Network &

With so many games being released via download for the newest consoles, it's easy to get lost in what's good and what's not. With this in mind, let us guide you through some of the latest releases in an effort to help direct your inherent desire to charge up the credit card and spend, spend, spend! Don't pull those scissors out just yet; there are some surprising gems floating in the sludge. **By Dylan Burns**

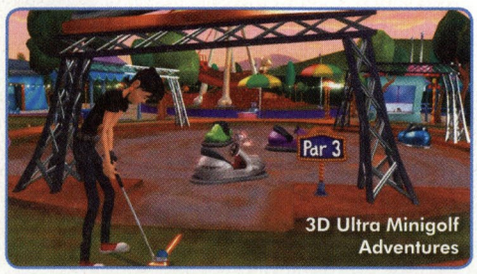
Xbox Live Arcade

3D Ultra Minigolf Adventures

800 POINTS

Developer: **Wanako Studios**

If nothing else, this title lets you live out your zero-g minigolf fantasies (and we all know you've had them). We like minigolf (or, more accurately, hitting ill-defined animal species in the head with golf balls) and we like games, so by default we like 3D Ultra Minigolf Adventures. A few more levels would have been nice, but the integrated collect-a-thon aspect certainly contributes to its replayability.



Band of Bugs

800 POINTS

Developer: **NinjaBee** / Points: **800**

Band of Bugs is about as far from Cloning Clyde (also by NinjaBee) as you can probably get – bugs crossed with turn-based combat a la Final Fantasy Tactics. But it works well, with a fairly light-hearted story mode and excellent support for player-created maps. If you like your tactical combat of the six-legged variety then this game is for you. Others will stay for the hilarious incongruity of ants having at each other with weapons and magic.

Carcassonne

800 POINTS

Developer: **Sierra Online** / Points: **800**

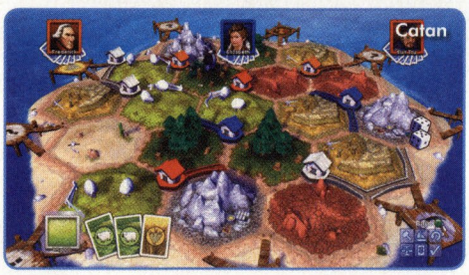
Yet another board game conversion (hurry up Monopoly), Carcassonne features tile-placing fun where what you build is determined by a limited set of geographical cards (castle, road, monastery). Almost like a virtual pop-up book, you see your empire expanding (or shrinking) before your eyes. The real fun comes from merging other players' tiles with yours to rack up the points and win the match. It's not for everyone, but we'd encourage downloading the demo at the very least.

Catan

800 POINTS

Developer: **Big Huge Games**

Take control of an imaginary island, build roads, hoard resources and generally play your cards close to your chest in this board game conversion. Shrewd tactics should pave the road to success... but not always. If only the real world was made from hexagonal tiles with huge numbers on them; it would make getting home from the pub much easier.

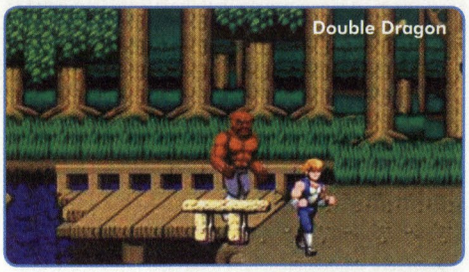


Double Dragon

400 POINTS

Developer: **Razerworks**

Billy and Jimmy Lee: twin brothers with a destiny to save the girl and kick butt in the process! This release is the arcade version of Double Dragon, and thus comes across as somewhat difficult and frustrating at times. A new lick of paint, graphically, is a nice touch, but does have the effect of sending the game to Chugstown. Head on down if arcade memories are important to you.

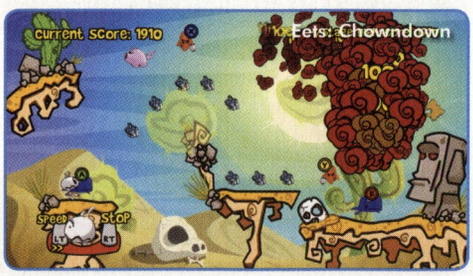


Eets: Chowdown

800 POINTS

Developer: **Klei Entertainment Inc.**

Not many games can claim to have prankster whales, vengeful marshomechs or, for that matter, radioactive ginseng. Eets: Chowdown manages to expand upon Eets: Hunger (its PC iteration) with gameplay somewhere in the vicinity of The Incredible Machine merged with Lemmings. High-def visuals also help to make this one a fairly polished experience.



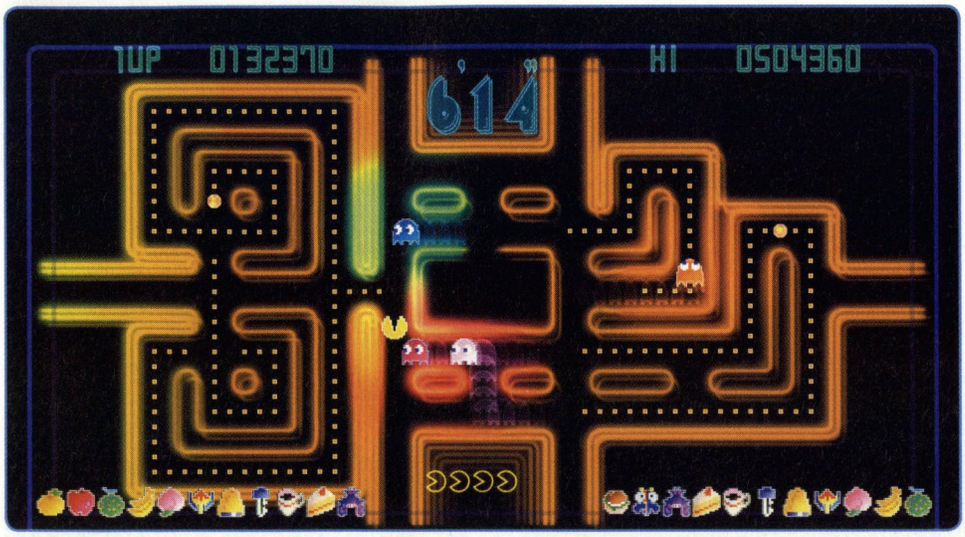
Missile Command

400 POINTS

Developer: **Stainless Games**

Your mission: to protect Planet Zargon's cities with your very life. Your targets: missiles, son, and plenty of them. Missile Command is yet another re-skinned classic, and for just 400 points you get explosive and frenetic gameplay, new graphics, a techno soundtrack and more explosions than you can poke a missile silo at. This is simplistic and repetitive target-based gaming. Running out of counter-missiles or allowing too many cities to explode spells game over.

& Virtual Console Roundup



Pac-Man Championship Edition

Developer: **Namco Bandai Games Inc.**

800 POINTS

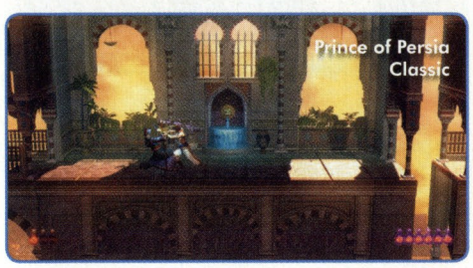
When you think about it, Pac-Man really ought to examine his addiction to popping little white pellets. He's even seeing ghosts, and that's not a good sign. Pac-Man Championship Edition comes with brand new mazes (invisible walls anyone?) and levels that actually change as you play, making level progression seamless. We'd stay and chat more, but we've got pellets to gobble up...

Prince of Persia Classic

Developer: **Gameloft**

800 POINTS

Wow, a re-skinned classic game done right! The original Prince of Persia was an awesome (if short) game, and with a new layer of HD goodness it's even more engrossing than ever. Gameloft have also added in one checkpoint per level so those of you who, as acne-riddled teens, felt the cruel spikes of death over and over again can now breathe a sigh of relief.



Soltrio Solitaire

Developer: **Silver Creek Entertainment**

800 POINTS

Ah solitaire, the game of choice for lazy bums at work. Soltrio Solitaire has eighteen game types on offer for its initial price and, ostensibly, up to 100 games available through downloadable packs (for a price of course). That's a lot of alone time. We also can't help but feel that charging so much for what is a free PC game is unethical and, well, unnecessary.

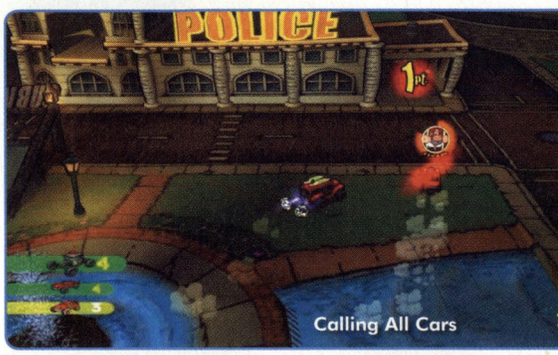
PS3 Network Games

Calling All Cars

Developer: **Incognito Entertainment**

$13.45

The object of Calling All Cars is to chase down escaped convicts while battling three other bounty hunters also set on capturing the slippery prize. Calling All Cars marks Sony's journey into original online games and it's actually a heap of fun to boot. Levels are limited (there are only four maps) but most of the fun comes from trying to score extra points by delivering the criminal in the most spectacular way possible. Multiplayer is also a blast.

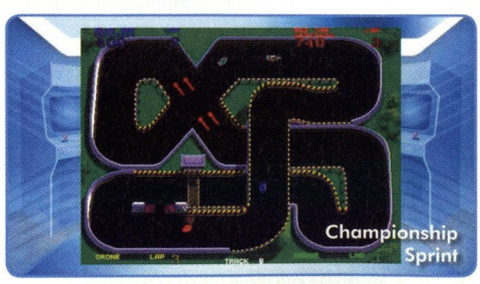


Championship Sprint

Developer: **Midway Games**

$5

Analogue input, pfft, who needs it for classic arcade games like this? Oh that's right, it kind of makes the game unplayable if the steering is so sensitive that it's an exercise in frustration. We're talking about small, tight courses and the need to steer through short-cut gateways, so the fact that the controls suck and the online multiplayer runs at a snail's pace really makes it hard to justify the money for this game.



Joust

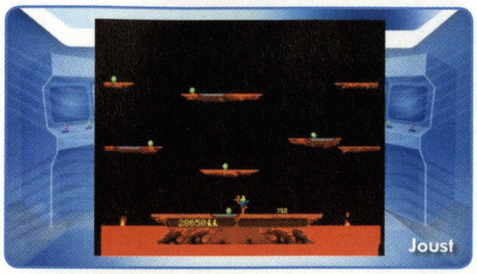
Developer: **Williams Electronics**

$5

If you've never heard of Joust you'll love the premise. You're a medieval knight mounted on an ostrich. Yes, an ostrich, but don't let that put you off because Joust features some excellent pick-up-and-play design. The name of the game is to destroy competing knights by making your lance hit theirs at a vertically higher point – that's where the ostrich

continued...

comes in, helping you to flap around and destroy eggs before even more powerful enemies hatch. There's also a pterodactyl. Yes, they were on drugs...



Mortal Kombat II

Developer: **Midway**

$5

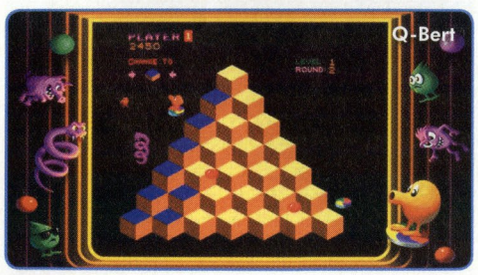
Mortal Kombat II is often considered the best in the Kombat series, as it introduced a heap of new features such as environmental kills, Babalities and Friendships. With that in mind, prepare to fork out a fiver and print off those character move lists all over again. What Kombat fan wouldn't want to experience this classic in HD? Multiplayer adds a whole new dimension to the game, although the lack of voice support is a bit of a let down.

Q-Bert

Developer: **SOE**

$5

You're probably getting sick of hearing it but the SIXAXIS simply doesn't seem to suit many of these arcade releases. We're not sure if it's the controller itself or the fact that old games simply can't align with analogue inputs. Q-Bert aptly highlights the lack of communication between the SIXAXIS and on-screen action. In a game where you need to avoid enemies while changing all the blocks of a pyramid into the same colour, this lack of control is, sadly, quite a massive flaw.



Rampart

Developer: **Backbone Entertainment / Digital Eclipse Software**

$5

"Build the defences, chaps. Quick Smart! What's that? You can't place things very well because of the SIXAXIS controller? What in tarnation is a SIXAXIS? By golly I'll have you put in the stocks you insubordinate whelps! We've got ships to shoot and damage to repair. What's that you say? 1080p is wasted on us? That's it, I can't understand you plebs at all... I'm retiring and doing voice work!"

Rampage World Tour

Developer: **Bally Midway Manufacturing Company**

$5

Meet George, Lizzy and Ralph. George likes long sessions of smashing things, whereas Lizzy and Ralph prefer to go the stomping route. All three enjoy destruction and eating people in equal doses. In Rampage World Tour, you're a big monster with a chip on your shoulder. You have, oh, about 120 levels of mayhem to enjoy. Punch, kick, punch, kick, it all gets a bit samey, and with no save function you might just go on a rampage of your own when the power cuts out on the 119th level.

Super Stardust HD

Developer: **Housemarque**

$TBA

Super Stardust HD is basically Geometry Wars, the huge difference being that it takes place on a spherical (planetoid) playing grid. You move with the left analogue stick and fire with the right, simultaneously avoiding and shooting three different types of asteroids. You also have three weapon types and you need to choose the right one for each situation, as well as when to upgrade them. Frenetic, addictive and gorgeous to look at, Super Stardust HD is definitely worth checking out.

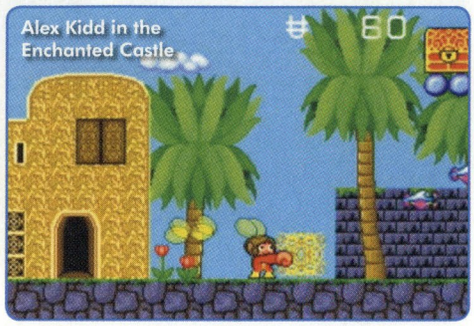
Virtual Console Games

Alex Kidd in the Enchanted Castle

Developer: **SEGA** / Origin: **SEGA Mega Drive**

800 POINTS

When Alex's father, King Thor, is kidnapped and held captive on the planet Paperock, it's up to our rather commonly-named hero to take the hurt to Paperock's denizens – Alex Kidd style! The only problem is that this style isn't exactly effective, nor is it particularly fun when you lose a brow-sweating game of Rock-Paper-Scissors to one of the game's bosses. A round of Chinese Burns would be much more satisfying.



Bonk's Adventure

Developer: **Red Company** /
Origin: **TurboGrafx-16**

600 POINTS

Not to be confused with the kind of stories told down the pub on a Sunday afternoon, Bonk's Adventure is a 2-D platformer that sees the aptly named Bonk bonking things with his huge caveman noggin. As you can see it's all very bonky, but in a good way. The game is actually great fun, and it's cool getting Bonk to eat different types of fruit and meat, the latter of which transforms him into an invincible bonking machine... much like most of the Hyper staff.

Castlevania

Developer: **Konami** / Origin: **NES**

500 POINTS

The year: 1691. The Place: Transylvania. The task: Whoop Count Dracula while at the same time surviving an onslaught of zombies, bats, dragons, and perhaps even Death himself (assuming Death can be assigned a gender). This is where the Castlevania series started; it's difficult, strictly linear and graphically average, but that doesn't stop Castlevania from being thoroughly engaging. Even the soundtrack still manages to impress.

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

Developer: **Rare** / Origin: **SNES** / Points: **800**

800 POINTS

DKC 2 is a platforming romp from start to finish. The clay-like graphics still impress today and with this second adventure you get more secrets, a new sidekick (Dixie) and various new locales. The difficulty feels just right and the controls are tighter than a frog's bum. Purchasing this title is pretty much a no-brainer.

F-Zero X

Developer: **Nintendo** / Origin: **N64**

1000 POINTS

F-Zero X, on release, introduced a brand new tactic to the series. You could basically deplete all of your ship's energy in an effort to boost ahead of the competition, but this would then leave you vulnerable, creating a balancing act between safety and speed. It also marked the technical achievement of 30 vehicles on one track at the same time without slowdown, but this came at a graphical price. It's still great fun though, and worth a look if you don't already have an F-Zero title.

Lylat Wars

Developer: **Nintendo EAD** / Origin: **N64**

1000 POINTS

1997 seems so long ago now, but the memory of playing Star Fox 64 (Lylat Wars for us Aussies) is still fresh and vivid. Oh how those 3-D graphics seemed so cutting-edge and realistic. Somehow we never questioned talking animals, or even the fact that they were charged with piloting Arwings and saving the universe. It's also easy to forget that the rumble pack that shipped with Lylat Wars set the gaming world on a path that now sees rumble technology in nearly every game. Sadly, and somewhat ironically, rumble is missing in this version, but the game itself still rocks.

Sonic the Hedgehog 2

Developer: **SEGA** / Origin: **SEGA Mega Drive**

800 POINTS

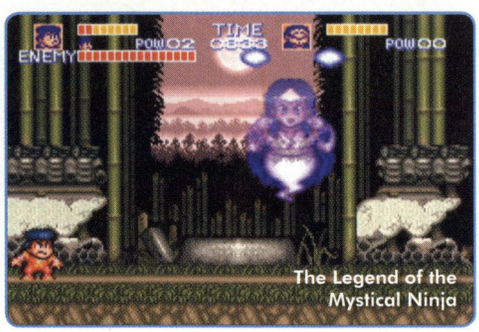
It's largely agreed that Sonic 2 improved upon the first game in virtually every aspect and can definitely be labelled a classic. Plus, it added the Spin Dash, which is just plain cool. We guess the only reason not to buy this on the VC would be if you already owned the game, seeing as it was certainly popular in its day. The VC conversion is fantastic, so we definitely give this one two thumbs up.

The Legend of the Mystical Ninja

Developer: **Konami** / Origin: **SNES** /

800 POINTS

The first Western release from the Japanese Ganbare Goemon series, The Legend of the Mystical Ninja is notable for its two-part structure. First up there are towns to explore, a few enemies to clobber, shops to browse, and minigames. Then there are the 2-D, side-scrolling levels with the requisite end bosses. It also boasts a robust co-operative element, with another player able to take control of Goemon's friend, Ebisumaru, and piggy-back around levels wreaking havoc.



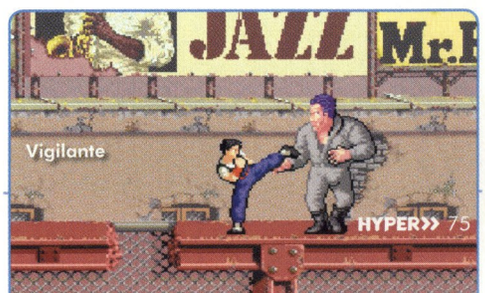
Vigilante

Developer: **Irem Software Engineering** / Origin: **TurboGrafx-16**

600 POINTS

Definition of beat-'em-up: A side-scrolling game whereby somebody innocent is kidnapped (usually female and kind of hot) and it's up to a lone muscled youth with inherent fighting skills to bash the shit out of a hundred or so generic bad guys (and maybe a few bosses) in order to win back the chick and save the day.

Definition of the Virtual Console game Vigilante: see beat-'em-up.



WinWinWi

WIN CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO FOR XBOX 360

>> Clive Barker is a very creepy man. Not creepy like that guy who always seems to be waiting at the bus stop and licks his lips just a little too often to be healthy, creepy in the sense of bringing otherworldly horrors to vibrant life and scaring the living piss out of you. That kind of creepy. Anyway. He has used his creepiness to script a new game. It's called Jericho. It's about the end of the world and special ops teams trying to stop it. It's creepy. It has a fat guy in it that attacks by tearing open his stomach. That's just gross.

All you need to do for a chance to win a copy of Clive Barker's Jericho on Xbox 360 is tell us in 50 words or less, **how would you creep out Clive Barker?**

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

WIN AFRO SAMURAI ON DVD!

>> Afro Samurai is the story of Number 1 and Number 2. Stop sniggering and get your filthy mind out of the gutter. We're not talking about any kind of bodily waste here. We're talking about Number 1, the number one swordsman in the world, a man so powerful he is a living god and Number 2, the only man who can challenge Number 1. Got it?

Afro Samurai tells the story of Afro, the current Number 2 tracking down Number 1 to avenge the death of his father, the previous Number 1, making the current Number one a former Number 2. Got it?

Everybody with a sword wants to be Number 2 so they can beat Number one so Number 2 must always defend himself and his Number 2 headband of antiquity from people who are trying to take it.

All this and Samuel Jackson swears a lot. What more could you want?

All you need to do for a chance to win a copy of Afro Samurai is answer the following question: **Name a haircut and fighting style more incongruous than Afro Samurai.**

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

WinWinWin

WIN RICKY PONTING INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2007 PRESSURE PLAY ON PSP!

10 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!

>> Have you ever been told that something is "just not cricket"? Are they referring to the game played with a bat and ball, respectively swung and bowled by men who drink too much on international flights or does the term refer to something not being a small to medium herbivorous insect capable of enormous jumps thanks to its spring-like hind legs? It is the question of our times and one destined to vex the finest scientific minds in the world.

All you need to do for a chance to win a copy of Ricky Ponting International Cricket 2007 Pressure Play is answer the following question in 25 words or less: **What isn't cricket?**

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

ATARI

WIN V8 SUPERCARS 3 CREATE & RACE ON DS!

10 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!

>> V8 Supercars are big. They're also loud and use a lot of fuel. Somehow, using arcane alchemy (as opposed to that thoroughly scientific form of alchemy), Codemasters have managed to squeeze not just one but 25 cars into a DS. That must be one heavy DS!

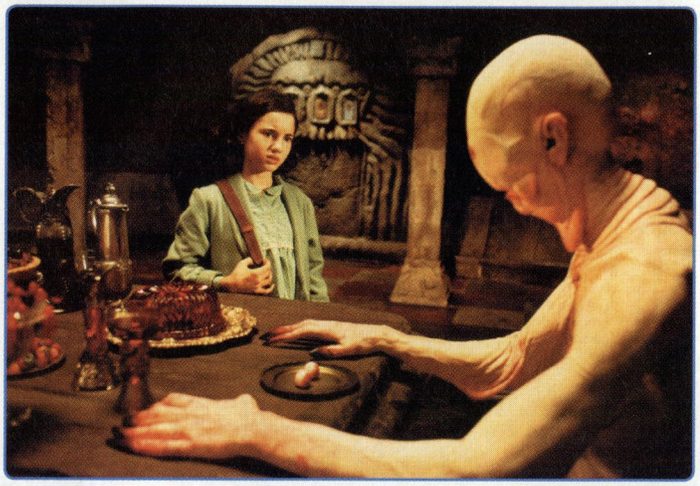
Anyway, V8 Supercars 3 Create and Race not only brings the pretty darn rad racing game to the DS, it also gives players the ability to use the DS stylus to create their own tracks to race on. Pretty neat, huh?

All you need to do for a chance to win a copy of V8 Supercars 3 Create and Race is answer the following question in 25 words or less: **How did Codemasters manage to fit 25 fully sized cars into one DS cart?**

Send your answer, with your name and address to: **They Hit Them With A Hammer I Expect, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

ATARI

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 August 7, 2007 and entries close at 6pm September 12, 2007. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am September 13, 2007 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners names will be published in the November issue of Hyper on sale October 3, 2007. 9) 10 Winners will receive a copy of Clive Barker's Jericho on Xbox 360 (RRP: $109.95). Total competition value $1099.50. 10 winners will each receive one copy of V8 Supercars 3 Create and Race on DS (RRP: $69.95). Total value of the competition is $699.50. 10 winners will receive a copy of RPIC 2007 Pressure Play on PSP (RRP: $79.95). Total value of the competition is: $799.50. 10 winners will receive a copy of Afro Samurai on DVD (RRP: $29.95). Total competition value $299.95. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.



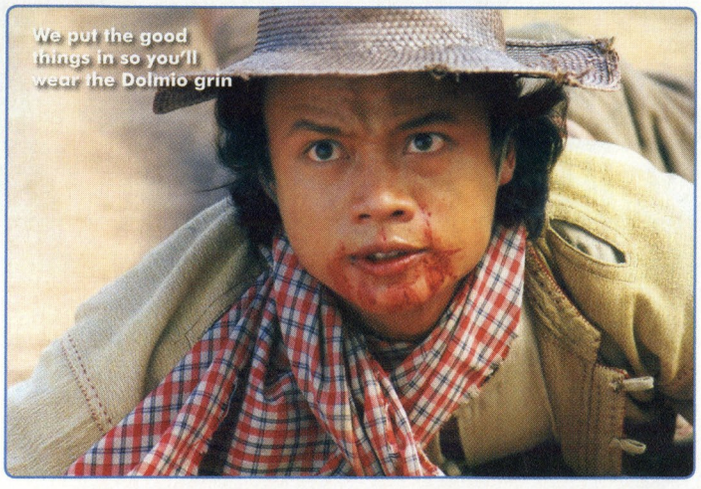
Pan's Labyrinth

HOPSCOTCH, MA 15+

Guillermo del Toro could retire now, safe in the knowledge that he has created a film that will be remembered for years to come in Pan's Labyrinth, a truly remarkable, brilliant, haunting, sad and strangely uplifting coming of age tale and eulogy for lost youth. Set during the tail end of WWII in Spain, Labyrinth tells the grim story of Ofelia, a little girl forced to move to the country with her mother by her National Guard stepfather, the odious, hateful and sadistic Captain Vidal. After discovering an ancient stone maze, desperate to escape the horrors of every day life, Ofelia begins to retreat into the fantasy world she discovers within. What transpires echoes the likes of Alice in Wonderland (though much closer to the Svankmajer version than the Disney version), the

Chronicles of Narnia and many other classics of fantasy in terms of artistry and impact. The performances are excellent throughout but special mention need be paid to the incredible Doug Jones (Abe Sapien from Hellboy), a talented mime who brings the movements of the fantastic creatures of the labyrinth to life and Sergi Lopez as the magnificently odious Captain Vidal, one of the most terrifying movie monsters in recent years. The two disc set from Hopscotch is a great addition to any DVD library with a director's commentary and a few featurettes but a full making of doco and some more interviews with the cast (notably Lopez) would have made the DVD nigh on perfect. As it stands, Pan's Labyrinth belongs on every shelf as the best film of 2006.

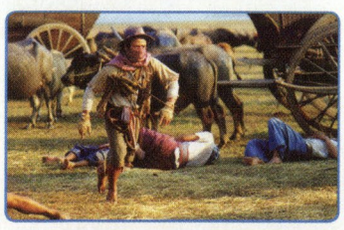
FILM: 10 / FEATURES: 8

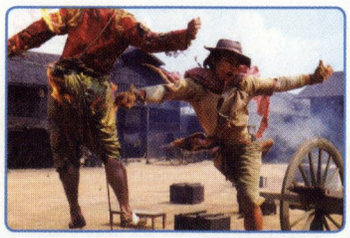


Dynamite Warrior

EASTERN EYE, M

It's probably more fun reading the plot and action of Dynamite Warrior than it is watching it. On paper the film has everything. A bandit hero with a penchant for fireworks who beats up ever cattle baron he can find believing that one of them is the tattooed man who killed his parents when he was just a boy, an evil cleft-lipped nancy trying to sell tractors, a cannibalistic giant simpleton who beats people to death with ox yokes, a black wizard covered in burns, said wizard's sexy daughters, a magical ox salesman and his hypnotized animal kung-fu fighting companions and a plot that requires the hero to chase after the sexy daughter of the black wizard so he can get her virgin menstrual blood so he can curse





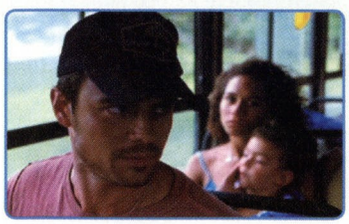
an immortal enemy and make him mortal by covering him in said blood. On paper that is awesome. On film it's a chaotic mess, not bad enough to be fun and not good enough to be enjoyable. The action choreography ranges from a few sublime moments reminiscent of Tony Jaa's crazy choreography in Ong Bak through to numerous fight scenes that would have looked more at home in a Michael Dudikoff movie. The humour isn't funny for the most part with the (assumedly) humourous scenes of the hero following around the virginal daughter of the Black Wizard and trying to look up her skirt to see if she is menstruating being especially difficult to watch.

FILM: 6 / FEATURES: TBA

Turistas

FOX, MA 15+

Take a bunch of unlikable characters, place them in a beautiful Brazilian setting, throw in some organ-leggers and them make every one of the characters (aside from the evil surgeon but we'll get to him in a second) make the wrong decision every time one is available and you have Turistas, yet another in the long line of torture style horror movies that seem overly prolific at the moment that manages to be neither tense nor gory. A bunch of stupid international backpackers get stranded when their stupid buss driver nearly runs them all off the side of a cliff then they stupidly decide to go wandering in the Brazilian jungle rather then stay and wait for the next bus. They come across a beach and after a few drinks from the local bar stupidly decide to stay on the beach instead of heading back to the road. In short order they are drugged and robbed. Then things go from bad to worse when instead of heading back to the road they decide to pick a fight with a local kid seen sporting a cap belonging to one of the backpackers. Cue some jungle scenery, some organ removal and some poorly done stalk and slash action. And a lot of screaming and bad decisions. It's kind of pathetic to realize that the only character in the film is the "evil" doctor performing the unnecessary surgery and selling the organs to the rich for transplantation. At least he has motive and thinks through his decisions, unlike every other character in the film. As the tag line to the film states, "There are some places tourists should never go" – we would suggest anywhere screening this waste of celluloid would be one of them.



The fast track to dialysis

FILM: 3 / FEATURES: 5

Reincarnation

MADMAN, MA 15+

I don't know about you, but I'm not the least bit scared by little girls with pretty dresses, pale faces and spooky dollies who appear and disappear at will. It seems that Japanese cinema-going audiences must be shit-scared of them, though, since sallow-skinned youngsters seem to crop up in at least every second J-horror film to make it across to our shores. Not least of these is Takashi Shimizu's Ju On, or as it's known over here, The Grudge.

Shimizu is again at work here in Reincarnation, yet another Japanese ghost story, this time focusing on what happens to the human soul after death and in particular what happens to a group of filmmakers and actors that are mysteriously linked to a tragic mass-murder.

Reincarnation takes a film-within-a-film structure, with the movie's protagonist, Nagisa Sugiura (played by Yûka) , playing the lead role in a fictional account of an infamous massacre that occurred at a countryside hotel in 1970, where a professor killed his own son and daughter, as well as the rest of the hotel's guests and staff.

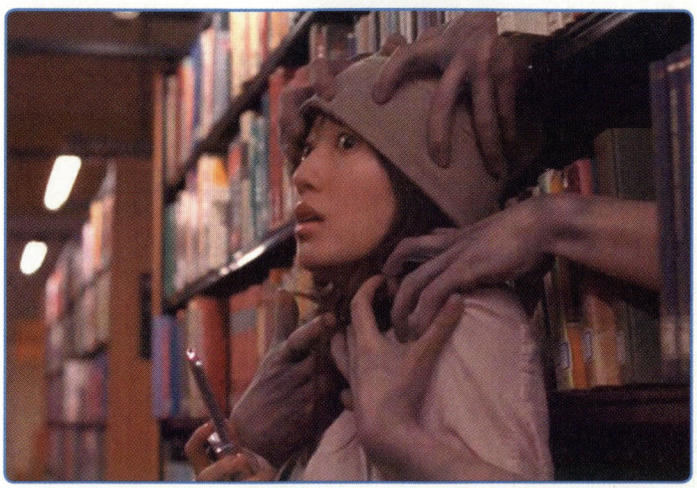
When rehearsals begin on the film, however, Sugiura begins to have frightening (or at least I think they're supposed to be frightening) visions of the aforementioned pale little girl, which eventually turn into full-blown flashbacks that immerse her in the exact moment of time where the murders originally happened.

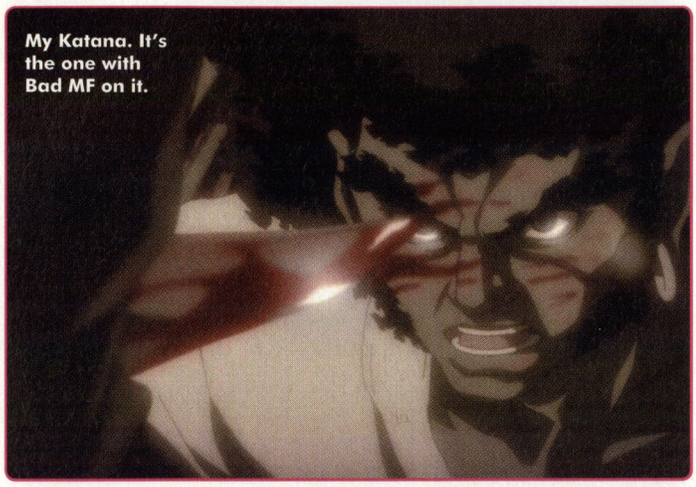
Reincarnation is set very much in the J-horror mould, and while it is eerie, I have to admit that I was neither surprised by any of the film's scares, nor by its entirely predictable final plot twist. Nevertheless, Reincarnation is still a very well made film. Despite it feeling like Shimizu is retreading old ground, his direction is clearly one of the film's greatest assets, and the performances of the cast are also excellent, particularly Yûka whose does a genuinely good job at looking completely terrified, even though the thing that's scaring her is a tot who's a quarter of her size, and twice as cute.

Maurice Branscombe

FILM: 7 / FEATURES: TBA

SPOOOOKY!



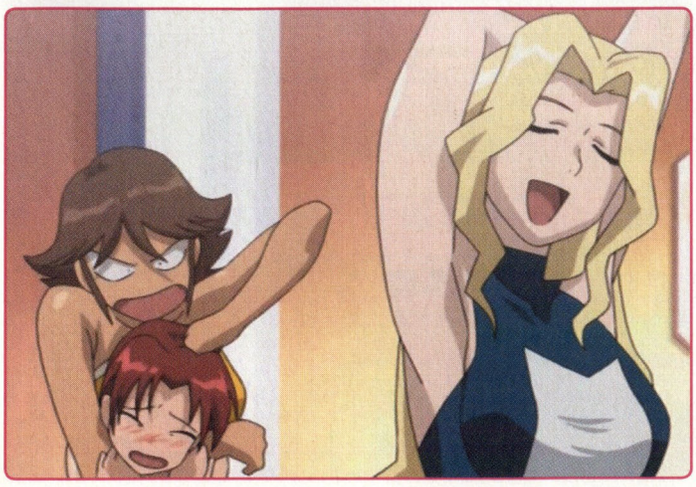


Afro Samurai

PRODUCTION: GONZO
GENRE: ACTION

Set in a near future alternate world in which a post-apocalyptic wasteland shares space with murderous cyborgs and mysticism, a time that is equal parts wild-west, feudal Japan and Mad Max style barter town, Afro Samurai tells the story of the titular Samurai, Afro, the current number 2 swordsman in the world trying to track down the current number 1 swordsman in the world to avenge the death of Afro's father, the previous number 1. You see, the story revolves around two headbands. The person who wears the number 1 headband is inviolate, a living god, safe from harm except from the person wearing the number 2 headband. The number 2 has a much harder time than number 1, however, as anyone can challenge Number 2 for the title so they can have their chance to fight Number 1. Samuel Jackson voices Afro as well as his sidekick Ninja Ninja. This is both the strongest selling point of the series as well as its weakest point as far as dialogue goes. Jackson is fine as Afro but Ninja Ninja just sounds forced whenever he opens his mouth, like the writers have tried to fit every recognisable "Jacksonism" into every sentence he utters. It's a pity because the rest of the show is remarkably tight. The exaggerated character designs are stunning and the animation is exceptional, even by Gonzo standards. The frequent fight scenes are always exciting to watch as the enemies and weapons they wield are drawn from a very diverse pool ranging from hottie cyborgs through to gaunt gunslingers, crazy monks with shoulder launched rockets and automatic crossbows and more. Although the story is simple it is well told and gripping. It's a pity the dialogue seems forced – perhaps to appeal to the American market - because with a little tweaking Afro Samurai could have been a real classic.

ANIMATION: 10 / STORY: 8
EXTRAS: 8 / **OVERALL: 9**



Solty Rei

PRODUCTION: GONZO
GENRE: CYBERPUNK

The premise of Solty Rei is something I could really dig. In a futuristic megalopolis a hard-boiled bounty hunter named Roy Revant tracks down cybernetically augmented criminals and beats the bejesus out of them, in a vain attempt to numb the pain of losing his wife and daughter in a cataclysmic exposition that destroyed the entire city twelve years before. Just as Roy is hitting rock bottom, however, he meets up with Solty, an indestructible and super-powerful robot girl, who has an innocent mind and a jailbait body.

At first Solty Rei seems like it's going to make good on its cool premise, with hints of a gritty tech-noir story showing through, but somewhere between the first and third episodes the futuristic grit is buried under ten tons of teen-girl melodrama, too many characters and a seeming lack of narrative direction.

Instead of focusing on the one interesting relationship the anime has, between Roy and Solty, far too much screen time is devoted to a gang of future-day Robin Hoods who steal from the rich to give to the poor, as well as a group of super-hot female cops who wear some barely-there power suits. The fights that occur between these two factions in particular are so shrill with high-pitched anime-voice-over-artist yelps that they will implode your eardrums.

Studio Gonzo are famous for using computer-generated elements along with their traditional cell animation, and this same technique is used fairly frequently in Solty Rei. The hand drawn animation is very nicely done and the CGI too is good, however, I have to admit that I'm not entirely convinced of the merits of mixing the two styles. While for the most part the CGI effects do add to the overall look of the series, you can definitely "see the strings" in many sequences that use CGI graphics, which can become an unwelcome distraction.

Had it focused more on the two most interesting characters and stuck with the initial tone of the series, Solty Rei could have been much better than it is.

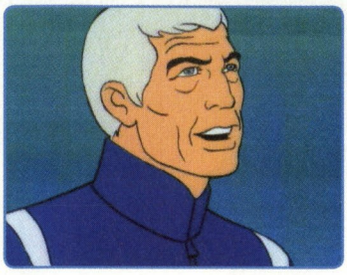
Maurice Branscombe

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 5
EXTRAS: TBA / **OVERALL: 6**

Sealab 2021

MADMAN, M

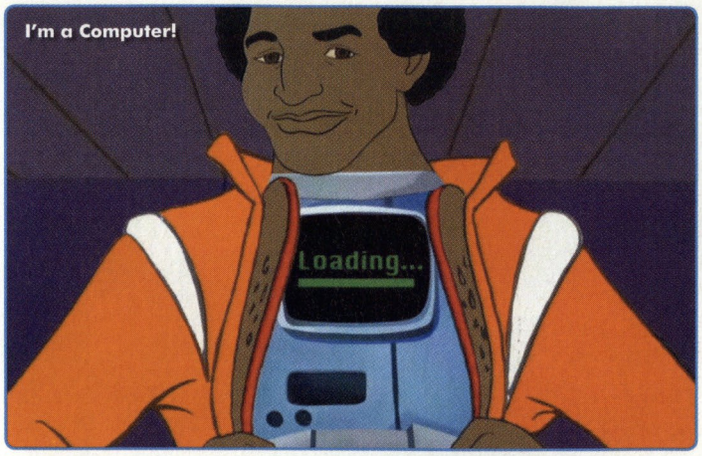
Most of you probably won't remember the original Sealab 2020 cartoon, not that you'd have many fond memories even if you did. The animation was shocking, the storylines were mind numbingly preachy without actually having any firm argument to back up the environmental message and the voice acting was pretty damn awful. Enter Sealab 2021, an Adult Swim series that takes the original cast of characters and follow their adventures in their undersea research facility 1 year on. Madness, delusions, interpersonal rivalries and sexual tension are the order of the day. Captain Murphy, the captain of Sealab forms kind of a hub for a lot of the action, more because he is prone to violence and wild

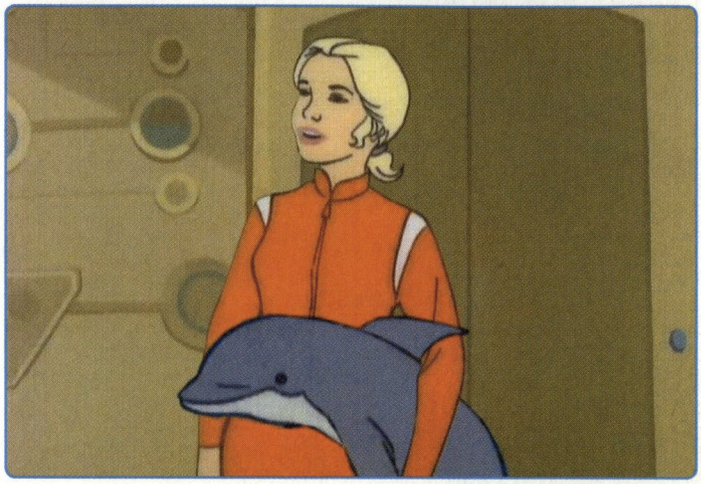


[above] Fear the Wizard

schemes (not to mention sexually attracted to cleaning products) than any real character drive. Other characters include Marco (voiced by Erik Estrada of C.H.I.P.S. fame), a muscle-bound Latino stud-muffin with no friends, Dr. Quinn (no relation to the Medicine Woman), a black doctor who thinks the rest of the crew don't like him because they're racist (it's really because he's a pompous arse) and Sparky, a conniving tech who never gets out of his chair. The show wildly mixes non sequitur, almost slapstick humour as well as some remarkably high concept gags. It's a hard show to grasp but once you let yourself go and just run with the strangeness there are a hell of a lot of laughs to be had.

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: 6





Venture Bros

MADMAN, M

Unlike other Adult Swim titles, The Venture Bros is made up of full 30-minute episodes, allowing the writers to create far more elaborate stories to cram their huge number of jokes into. A parody to tenacious teen series such as Johnny Quest, The Hardy Boys and the like, The Venture Bros documents the adventures of the titular brothers, their scientist father and family friend/assistant. Unlike the genre norm though, The Venture family is anything but, well, normal. Rusty Venture, the scientist father is a whining, ninny, the two boys, Hank and Dean are motherless (in the fact that they actually don't appear to have a mother and never did), mindlessly optimistic and pure simpletons who approach everything like it was an adventure and the family friend/assistant, Brock Samson is a muscle-bound killing machine, licensed by the government to snuff out anyone he wants. Of course no good scientist and co. can get by without an arch nemesis. In Venture Bros, that role is filled by The Monarch, a

[above] Lemon Face

butterfly-themed villain with a sexy sidekick, Dr. Girlfriend, proud owner of a hot body and a voice like a New York cabbie. Much like The Tick, The Venture Bros takes a very skewed and hilarious look at the genre conventions, playing with stereotypes and character roles in ways that will be familiar to fans of the offbeat superhero series. Although still simple, the animation and is far more intricate than what is usually seen in Adult Swim productions. Character design and voice acting complement each other perfectly, with Patrick Warburton (of The Tick live action and Family Guy fame) as the stoic Brock Samson standing out as truly hilarious.

FILM: 9 / FEATURES: 6

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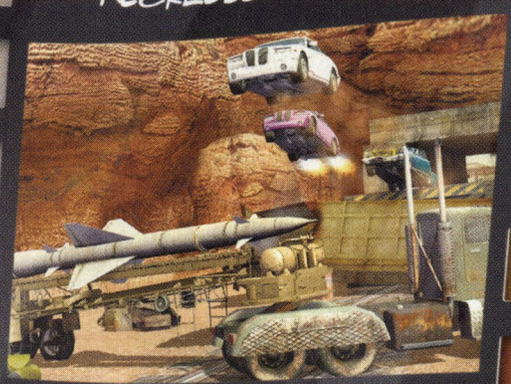

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The WOW Chronicles

Ding, Baby, Ding

» JackTheGrin

Then, out of nowhere, everything old is new again. Bored as hell, grinding damn zebras or whatever the hell they are in Nagrand, doing endless PvP quests for trinkets, chopping up ghosts in a desert (yawn) I hit Shadowmoon Valley. And I realise with some shock that I'm level 69.

Bored still, I decide to at least grind it out. It's not helping though. I'm intensely not into the whole Warcraft experience. I left my lame ass guild so I'm just solo playing. With a desultory /1 I advertise for help with an elite quest. Not expecting nuffink.

'Sure, we'll help.' It's a priest called Boplouie. Before you know it, some insane tank called Holyreaper is leading an impossible charge up a ramp. We're taking out blood elves, elite giants, and it all ends with a scripted level 70+ elite encounter. We're all moving so damn fast I don't even know what's going on! We wipe! These guys laugh! The voice of Illidan himself is mocking us, they mock back! Oh, it's ON, son! We keep the party together and five players get a whole bunch of difficult quests done in just a few hours.

Before you know it, I've just had the most fun in months playing this game. So I join a guild called Bonkers. And just like that, I'm enjoying World of Warcraft again. A self described bunch of burnt out end game raiders, they all decided to chill out and take a 'for the hell of it' attitude. I love my new guild.

'Lets' go to Shadow Labs!' they decree.

'I dunno guys. I'm not sure I'm geared enough for that.'

'Shut the F&(K up, Jack. We're going.'

Badda bing, badda boom! Slabs down!

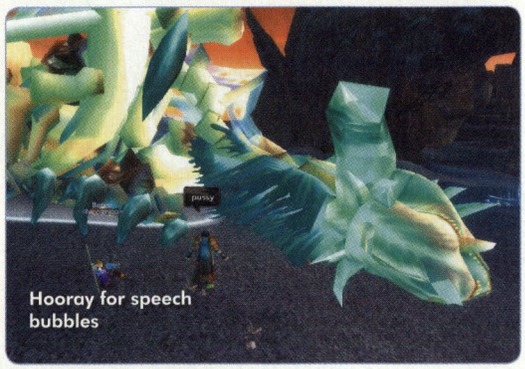
'Done the Escape from Durnhold Keep, Jack?'

'Nah, but it's pretty late. I'm gonna go to sleep.'

'Shut the %uc! up, Jack. We're going.'

My guild are bullies. But the best damn kind. It's like they're forcing fistfuls of great gaming down my comatose throat!

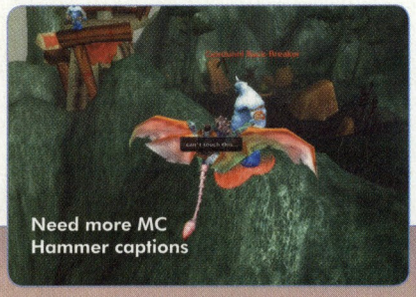
But even better, a whole slew of elite quests and Instance runs gives me access to the holiest of holies... the flying mount.



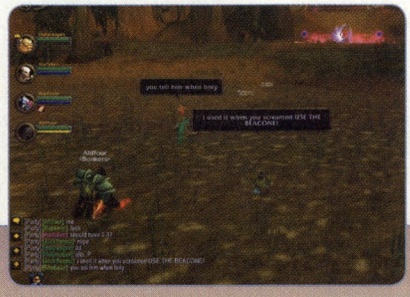
Hooray for speech bubbles

Oh my. It changes the whole game. Not only are you questing with a hell of a lot of ease, flying is fun, man! There's new areas you can't get to, you're saving time moving around Outlands. And its little things as well. I saved Netherstorm till last. Now, instead of having to hack my way through hordes of low level flunkies with no good money or loot, I'm just flying overhead, locating Mob targets to wipe out, drops, or just exploring the whole damn planet!

So it is, refreshed and invigorated, I'm back into WoW with enthusiasm.



Need more MC Hammer captions



Next month – *Life Begins at 70*

HYPER Game Retailer Offers

	STORE NAME	LOCATION	OFFER
bgamer.com.au	**Bgamer** *www.bgamer.com.au* *Info@bgamer.com.au*	Online Retailer. Based in Byron Bay NSW *"If you can't find it on the website, call us direct! 02 66809166"*	• Chipped slim PS2 with two joypads for $299 • Chipped Nintendo Wii $499 • Play your favourite games in PAL or NTSC!
GAMES WAREHOUSE	**Games Warehouse** *www.gameswarehouse.com.au*	Online Retailer Ph 02 96485656 and Warehouse pickup Silverwater,NSW.	Pre-order the GTA 4 Limited Collectors Security Lock Box Edition for Xbox 360 or Playstation 3 now!
quikshop AUSTRALIA YOUR ONLINE SPECIALTY DEPARTMENT STORE	**Quikshop** *www.quikshop.com.au*	Online Retailer: Games, Movies, Mobile Phones, Digital Cameras, Video Cameras PH: 1300786151	• **CONSOLES FOR COST!** • Wii MEGA bundle, wii + extra controller + 3 games + FREE shipping only $579 • Save up to 50% store wide on mobile phones and cameras. • Order 4+ games/dvd's and receive FREE shipping..
www.scorptec.com.au scorpion TECHNOLOGY	**Scorpion Technology Computers** *www.scorptec.com.au*	Online Retailer. Webiste: www.scorptec.com.au	Purchase any Kingston DDR2 memory with a compatible CPU & Motherboard, and receive $10 off your order. Enter the promo code **HYPKIN8** when ordering online.
www.austin.net.au	**Austin Computers** *www.austin.net.au*	Austin Computers - Osborne Park Unit 3 / 52 Frobisher Road Osborne Park, WA 6017 Tel: **61-8-92012788** Fax: **61-8-92012799** *Please see website for more store locations*	Buy any Kingston HyperX memory product and get 5% off any Kingston flash memory product (limit 3 per transaction) OR 5% off any Asus CPU cooler (limit 1 per transaction). Goods must all be purchased on the same day as the HyperX product.

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

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hotseat

Developers answer your questions about stuff

You asked the questions, we got you the answers - **IR Gurus** speaks up about Heatseeker.

etnilcarus
Flight/combat simulation has always garnered mixed responses from audiences and critics alike and generally attracts a very specific crowd. Reigning franchises like Ace Combat clearly present a challenge to the success of this title. Aside from your more arcade focus, what are you doing to set yourself apart and hopefully bring new people to this veteran genre?

Ben Board *(Producer, Heatseeker)*
We have huge respect for the Ace Combat series. Heatseeker tried not to out-do it – a near-impossible task for a new franchise – but to provide a different experience: much more immediate, much more arcade-focussed, much less serious, and concentrating not on realism and emotional depth but on epic battles, hundreds of targets, terrific explosions, simple weapon choices, and adrenaline-fuelled instant action. Some reviews criticised our voice acting, for instance, but they missed the point; it (like the rest of the game) was always supposed to be over-the-top, like a James Bond action movie. We always considered Afterburner, Burnout and Full Auto closer genre comparisons, and we never, ever used the word 'simulation'.

You island asplode

aubergine
Do Heatseeker's graphics make use of the Wii's significant power advantage over the PS2, or have you simply dumped the PS2 build into the Wii and added an easy effect or two like every other developer who has made Wii ports so far?

Ben Board *(Producer, Heatseeker)*
The Wii version is certainly heavily based on the PS2 build, but it's had plenty of extra work including the addition of advanced lighting, improved water effects, changes to the HUD, and many more, as well as the work we did to make the best flight controls you can buy on Wii. If you think spherical harmonic lighting and dynamic self-shadowing are 'easy effects', please contact us to arrange an interview.

Choabac
Being an Australian development house, do you feel this gives you a different insight/approach when designing games as opposed to US studios? Does Australian culture distinguish us apart from studios in other western countries?

Ben Palmer *(Strategic Director)*
Most games are designed for international audience, so too many Australian references would confuse Biff in New Jersey. Years ago some of the background text in KKND was a good example of Aussie humour,

Not sure a Battletech grid map makes good camo

but it confused the translation houses no end. As development goes, Australians are often seen as self sufficient and problem solving. This is probably due to the time difference between us and Europe or the US; it's usually quicker to work out the solution than wait for overseas assistance.

Lazlow

Why has no developer been successful in creating a competent AFL game?

Justin Halliday *(Senior Producer at IR Gurus)*

The major issues with the development of AFL games have been economic. Every AFL game is compared to the competing FIFA and Madden titles, and even the Cricket and Rugby games. But in each of these cases the AFL game can only sell to a significantly smaller market than those other sports. FIFA sells worldwide but mainly in Europe, Madden sells worldwide but mainly in the US, Cricket and Rugby sell through the UK, Australia, NZ, and South Africa. AFL sells only in Australia, and even then mainly in Victoria.

UC1

Do you think Wii owners would prefer to have more original IPs, so that their games aren't constantly compared those on PS2 and PSP?

Justin Halliday *(Senior Producer at IR Gurus)*

Of course Wii owners would prefer more original IPs, I think that this is true of each of the consoles. But I think that the success of the Wii has taken many industry people by surprise, so it's only recently that publishers have looked at the Wii as a viable platform for original IP, rather than as platform to which titles are ported. Wii owners are also lucky that they can play Nintendo's latest versions of Zelda, Mario, Metroid, games that will, presumably, never come to other platforms. At the end of the day though, Wii games are not going to compare technically to PS3 and Xbox360 titles. However, unique Wii games with well-designed player controls are always welcome.

Mr M

In terms of development costs, did you find it was more cost effective to develop for Wii and PS2 rather than Xbox 360 and PS3? Do you think this is a trend that will be followed in the future by you or other developers, in that smaller (i.e. not FF or GTA) games will forego the new generation in favour of PS2/Wii?

Ben Palmer *(Strategic Director)*

Ultimately it's not a matter of game development cost, but that the potential market is big enough to justify the investment. It's true that developing for Xbox360 and PS3 can be very expensive, but as the market share of these consoles grows, development for them becomes more viable. Currently all IRGurus new work (3 titles) is Xbox 360 and PS3.

QuestionTime!

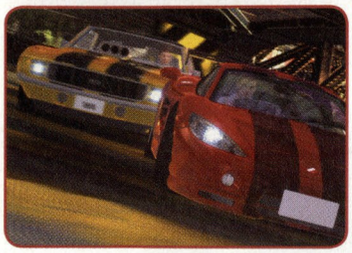
It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month int he Hot Seat sits Jade Raymond and Patrice Desilets of Ubisoft Montreal, developers of the hugely anticipated Assassin's Creed for Xbox 360, PS3 and PC, a game often considered to be the real poster-child for the next-generation. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to Jade and Patrice. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

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

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

hotseat

Developers answer your questions about stuff



You ask the question, we make them answer. **Juiced Games** spill the beans on Juiced 2.

El Nombre

Are there any differences between the different formats? What about the DS and PSP version, are they essentially the same game as the console counterparts or have they been altered to fit the requirements of the respective handhelds?

The good news is that each version of the game has been coded separately to ensure we get the most from all the hardware. The DS and PSP versions will be very different – in fact, the PSP will share more in common with the PlayStation2 version. Another difference is the tracks. The platforms will each feature some "exclusive" tracks that have been designed with the platforms strengths in mind.

TAT

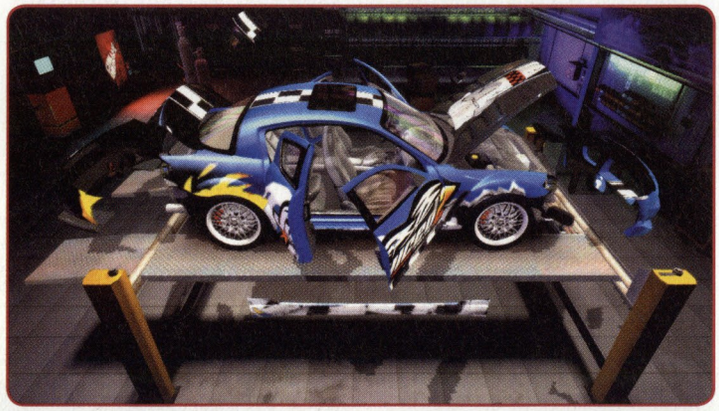
Why the decision to make a sequel to a game that never really took off? Wouldn't a fresh or new take on the racing genre be more appropriate?

Juiced2: Hot Import Nights is a new take on the genre – one that other developers look set to imitate soon. We've dropped the intimation that the games about illegal street racing. This is an event driven race around world famous landmarks and featuring the first "proper" attempt at introducing drifting to gamers!

PrattP

Are there any special features/additions that will set Juiced 2 apart from other racing games in the genre? Anything that's never been seen/done before?

The online career mode is unique. Being able to play the game in a real world where everyone is striving to move up the league system is pretty cool. The online betting mode is also different to any other game out there. Being able to watch races and place bets in real time is cool but being able to cheer or boo the drivers and having that effect a race is awesome. Finally, and I could go on for ages, the car customisation system is second to none – modding your car is almost an art form!



Quatters

How will you differentiate your car list from other games? Will there be some cars that other games overlook? Will some of the weaker cars not be included in Juiced 2?

We've tried to choose cars that are common to the modding scene. Early leagues will feature some cars you just wouldn't normally spot in other games like this. The idea is that you can take a hot-hatch and customise it so it'll be able to perform against other higher-rated cars. We have included a handful of supercars as bench marks but even these aren't the usual Lamboghinis and Ferraris. Can you take an entry level car and tune it to be able to compete against a Melling Hellcat or Koenigsegg CCX? Get Juiced2: Hot Import Nights and find out.

Mr M

How will the game appeal to gamers who weren't huge fans of the Fast and the Furious trilogy?

The Fast and the Furious is exactly what we have tried to avoid. This is a grass roots modding game featuring cars that you can spot on your street and parts you can go and buy for your ride at your local parts store. Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights is not about movie stars and the false glamour. This game's got a gritty feel and the gameplay makes you want to keep playing to get better and better.

JubeiSaotome

Are you guys going to attempt to target a different audience than the Need for Speed/Project Gotham audience in an attempt

If only we could get you to caption the Hot Seat too

to sell copies this time?

We're going after people who are into the real tuning scene. The gamers who really know about modding their cars. No other game comes close to Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights for being able to customise your car! The feature list for our game puts the others in the shade so I think it's for everyone who likes the driving genre.

JubeiSaotome

Have you learnt from the mistakes you made with the first games? If so, address them for us and how you are going to fix these?

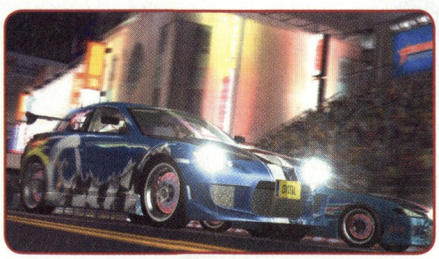
Hi. We certainly read all the comments about the first game and took real notice. Put simply, Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights is just fun to play. It's all about the driving game experience and having an entertaining experience, whether it's circuit racing or drifting, customizing yourself in the game and your car, or getting online with all of your friends for some friendly competition. The frustration of having to pay to enter races and fix your car has gone. The game knows what it wants to be and doesn't confuse the player.

Azzaman

Was a sequel to this game a decision from the marketing division or was this pushed from the developer's side?

The developers were pleased with the original Juiced game but had several ideas that they wanted to add and expand upon just couldn't fit into the development time. They listened to the criticisms of the first game and drew up the plans for Juiced 2. We spotted the similarity to the Hot Import Nights events and rest is history – a match made in heaven!

The bottom car needs some sweatbands



ENKC

To put it bluntly, what will prevent your game from becoming yet another unglorified Need for Speed Underground clone (ala Street Racing Syndicate etc)? And does the gaming world need more of these games?

I agree that the NFS games are very similar. What we've tried to achieve with Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights is a game that's far more "real". We've ditched the Hollywood glitz and aimed the game at the type of guys that actually tune and mod cars. The gameplay is different too! The introduction of our league system in which you progress by achieving goals is great – both in on and off-line modes! However, for me, the part of the game that lifts Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights above the competition is the drifting, it's like a complete new take on the racing genre. The fact that it comes as an integral part of the game is a just a bonus.

Weezin' the ju-uice, Pauly Shore style

Lazlow

Do you intend to feature a licensed soundtrack? If so, do you intend to target a particular genre of music?

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights does feature a licensed soundtrack. The difficult part has been blending genres. The artists that appear at Hot Import Night events are mainly rap, r'n'b and hip-hop performers. We've tried to keep this essence but added rock and dance genres to provide more compelling tracks for the race part of the game. The result is an interesting fusion that we're sure you'll like.

Azzaman

It looks like a new NFS game (Prostreet) is coming out probably around the same time as Juiced2, how do you feel about this sort of competition?

Is that right? (Does quick Google search) Hmmm, it looks like Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights will be available a couple of months before the NFS game. In terms of competition there is always going to be other games vying for your attention and NFS is just another one. It is interesting to see the direction the NFS franchise has taken thought, isn't it? We're proud that Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights is all about innovation and evolving the genre.

QuestionTime!

It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month int he Hot Seat sits the collective arse of Free Radical, developers of the drug fuelled, distopic, near future FPS Haze, a game built from the ground up for 4-player co-op. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to Free Radical. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

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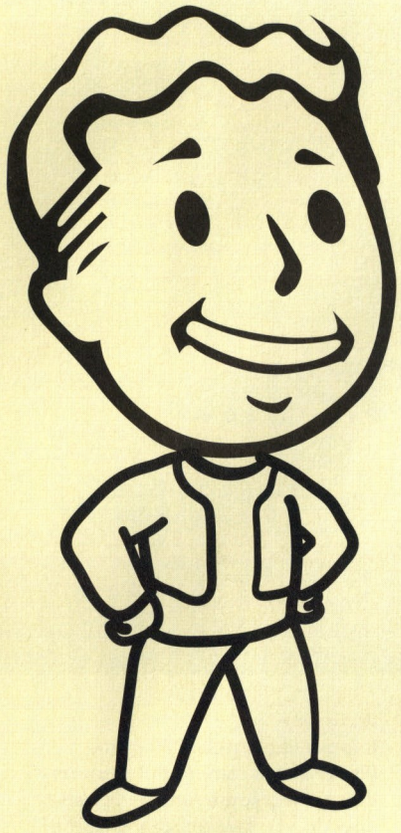
Questions can be posted in the Hot Seat area of the Hyperactive forums *http://forums.hyperactive.com.au/*



Your Official HYPER® Survival Guide To

PROJECT VAN BUREN

THE FALLOUT 3 THAT NEVER WAS™

Greetings, valued reader! Thank you for purchasing the Official HYPER® Survival Guide to PROJECT VAN BUREN. As you are no doubt aware, PROJECT VAN BUREN was the codename given to the original version of FALLOUT 3 produced by Black Isle Studios – a company famous for its work on popular computer role-playing modules such as FALLOUT 2 and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT. Although approximately 75% complete, the project was put on infinite hiatus following the closure of Black Isle in late 2003, and so was assumed to be forever lost. But now, thanks to the hard-work of a few dedicated intertron whiz-kids, Average Joes like you can play an early demonstration version of PROJECT VAN BUREN for free using a standard electronic computing machine!

How, you ask? Why it couldn't be easier! Simply turn on your computing machine, activate the intertron module of your choice, and enter the following directions into the Uniform Resource Locator typespace: **http://www.nma-fallout.com/forum/dload.php?action=file&file_id=892**. If entered correctly (watch out for those tricky forward slashes!), your intertron module will retrieve the files and soon you'll be able to activate and enjoy PROJECT VAN BUREN in the comfort of your very own home.

But hold up a second! Before rushing off into the post-apocalyptic wasteland, it is recommended that users familiarise themselves with some basic facts and figures relating to the PROJECT VAN BUREN demonstration module. Please refer to and memorise the information presented in Table A.

THE TITLE SCREEN: AN ADVENTURE IN BROKEN BUTTONS

Upon activating the PROJECT VAN BUREN module for the first time, you will no doubt notice two things: 1) the big freight train with FALLOUT 3 scrawled on the carriage, and 2) the fact that most of the buttons on the title-screen don't work (including, sadly, the "Play With A Friend" option). Don't be alarmed – your computing machine is not in error, this is the way it's supposed to be. To start playing the game, guide the pointing-reticule to the START NEW GAME button and gently depress the left-side of your input device until a slight "click" is heard. Congratulations! You have successfully begun a new game of PROJECT VAN BUREN.

TABLE A: PROJECT VAN BUREN FACTS AND FIGURES

NAME: PROJECT VAN BUREN aka. FALLOUT 3
DEVELOPER: Black Isle Studios
STATUS: Discontinued
GENRE: Role-playing
TECHNOLOGY: Built with Jefferson Engine – a proprietary 3D engine intended for use on Baldur's Gate 3
NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: Approx. 17 (2 in demo module)
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: Multi (single in demo module)
NUMBER OF TOPLESS FEMALE CHARACTER MODELS: 1
TOTAL STORAGE SPACE REQUIRED: 241 Mb (demo module)
CHANCE OF CRITICAL CRASH WITHIN 5-MINUTES OF ACTIVATION: 80%

fig. 2a

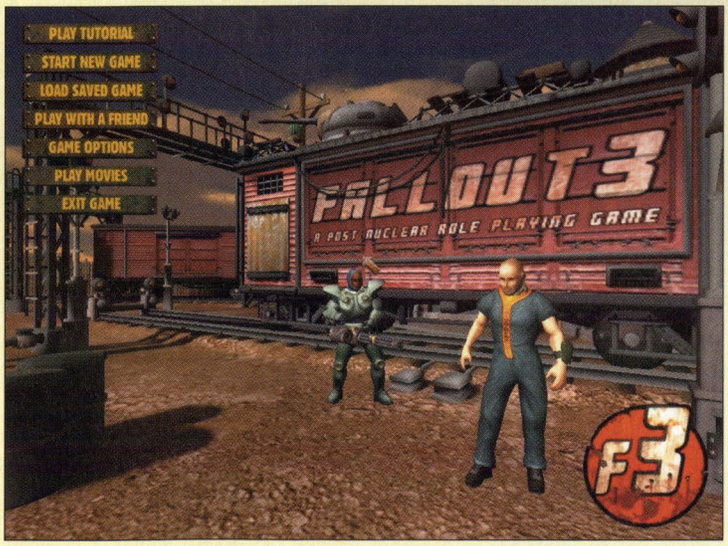


fig. 2b

CHARACTER CREATION: MAKE MINE NIETZSCHE!

After activating the Start New Game button, you will be greeted with the Character Creation screen. As you can see from the included image (figure 2a), there is a wide variety of appearance variables available for your character, including options for hairstyle, hair-colour, build, and moustache. In the first example, you can see how easy it is to use the "mutton" moustache to create a striking facsimile of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Also notice how, in the second example (figure 2b), the female character is almost entirely naked. Ordinarily, such blatant pornography would be cause for scandal, but in this case it's merely a texturing error – and therefore excusable. (You can stop looking now, gentlemen…)

A NOTE FROM DEVELOPER
J.E. SAWYER

The tutorial was supposed to be an "educational film" called "After the Bombs Fall: Moving into Your New Vault". In it, you played a young woman who comes home with her brother to find that her parents were wasted by Commie insurgents. The bombs are starting to fall, and you and your brother have to make your way to a vault with the help of GMC Cpl. Armstrong. The segments in the demo are the last two portions of the tutorial.

fig. 4c

fig. 4a

Once you've configured all the appropriate appearance and ability-based variables, give your new character (who is surely a male, as only degenerates and atheists would send a lady into danger) a final once over and activate the DONE button. A short loading interval will follow. Assuming there are no module malfunctions, the next thing you see will be your character standing on the fringes of a desolate slum (figure 3a). Don't fret – even though you're charged with navigating this Communist-infested ghetto, you are not alone! In figure 3b, you can see that the friendly and well-armed GMC Cpl. Armstrong is there to help you give those dirty Reds exactly what they deserve: an extra-large dose of hot American lead!

fig. 3a

fig. 3b

STAYING ALIVE: KILLING COMMIES FOR FUN & PROFIT

While playing PROJECT VAN BUREN, it is inevitable that you will eventually be forced to defend yourself from the aggression of bloodthirsty Communists. In this post-apocalyptic dystopia, years of exposure to radioactive fallout and insidious Marxist propaganda has turned what were once peaceful communities of respectable men and women into tribes of amoral savages (figure 4a). Fortunately, thanks to the foresight of the good people at Black Isle, you can be confident in your ability to meet this threat head-on, provided you remember to follow these three simple rules:

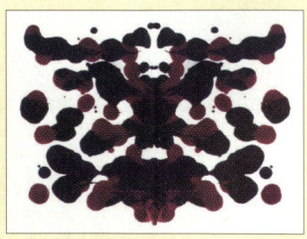
1. ***ALWAYS*** equip yourself before going into battle. By activating the INVENTORY button on the lower right hand corner of the screen, you will gain access to the INVENTORY SCREEN (figure 4b), where you can arm yourself and also put on any armour that you have. In the example, you can see that our unnamed protagonist has equipped a flamethrower and leather jacket – a potent combination!
2. ***LOOT*** everything and everyone. It's well known that Communists have no respect for private property, so they should have no complaints when you strip their bullet-riddled bodies (figure 4c) of equipment and valuables.
3. ***SHOW*** no mercy. Reds are renowned for their cowardice, and will often attempt to flee battle at the slightest sign of injury. Don't let them get away! Even if they surrender, even if they beg for mercy, you must always do your duty as a citizen and a patriot. Better dead than red!

fig. 4b

FINAL WORD: TROUBLESHOOTING

You should now have all the basic information you need to survive and enjoy PROJECT VAN BUREN. Should you encounter unforseen module malfunctions, remember that you can always toggle numerous game options by editing the F3.INI, which you will find in your MY DOCUMENTS/F3 folder. For more information on this topic, make sure to visit **http://www.nma-fallout.com/article.php?id=35862.**

Thank you, and God speed!



PSYCH-TEST: ARE YOU SANE ENOUGH TO PLAY PROJECT VAN BUREN?

Q. What do you see in the inkblot above?

1. COMMUNISTS!
2. An American flag billowing majestically in the wind
3. A negro stealing a motorcycle
4. Delicious apple pie

If you answered with anything other than 2 or 4, then you may be at risk of insanity and should report to a mental health professional immediately.

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LETTER OF THE MONTH!

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

★★Letter of the Month!★★

GRAND THEFT INTERACTION

I've just recently been viewing the new GTA 4 trailers on the Internet and I have to say, it's looking pretty amazing. It looks like the series is heading into a direction with fresh, new ideas that is worthy to be branded as a true GTA sequel. Although I say this, I was thinking the same thing when I first saw San Andreas, which was a game I was slightly disappointed with. I played through and completed Vice City and San Andreas and have played through most of GTA3. After playing these games to death, I still have a major problem with them. Where is the interaction with the environment and people? San Andreas offered a large map, roughly from my memory about three times that of Vice City. Although enormous in size, most of this space serves no purpose. The buildings in the game were blocks with storefront textures pasted on them, of which most of them the player could not enter. The fact that there is absolutely no interaction with civilians bothers me. Sure you can shoot and run them over with your massive 4x4, but that's not really a good form of interaction is it?

Although this new GTA game looks amazing, hopefully Rockstar will spend a little more time creating more interaction with the environment and people rather than just a pretty map with wasted space which serves no purpose and AI which does nothing other than walk in a specified direction. How awesome would it be if the player could go to a baseball stadium, walk amongst the crown and see a game being played right in front of them? You decide to jump onto the pitch and you have an effect on the game by hassling players, which at this point the security comes after you. Or how about the player can go into office buildings and explore each floor, see people working at their desk and maybe even get a job like a photographer for a newspaper. The ability to talk to random civilians, follow them for an entire day, watch them go to work, have their lunch break and go home. Maybe the player can meet people and make friends. I know this is starting to sound like a Sims game but you get my point... hopefully.

So I guess what I have suggested probably defies the point of a GTA game, where the player sits down plays a few missions and has a bit of fun. I'm not having a crack at Rockstar, GTA games are enjoyable even with their flaws, I'm merely sharing the kind of GTA game I would enjoy playing. A little bit more interaction would be good, but this will probably develop as the series develops into this generation and the following. Who wants to hear what I have to say about Zelda?

Anthony McKeown

We get your point Anthony. The Grand Theft Auto series has been great so far, but the technical limitations of previous hardware generations have definitely contributed to the series' restricted interaction.

With GTA IV those barriers look to have finally been broken down. We've seen GTA IV in action, and we can tell you that at least a few of your gripes with previous GTA games have been addressed. You will now be able to explore not only the outside of buildings, but also the insides, without loading screens interrupting play, and from what Rockstar have told us there will be a huge number of building interiors for you to explore.

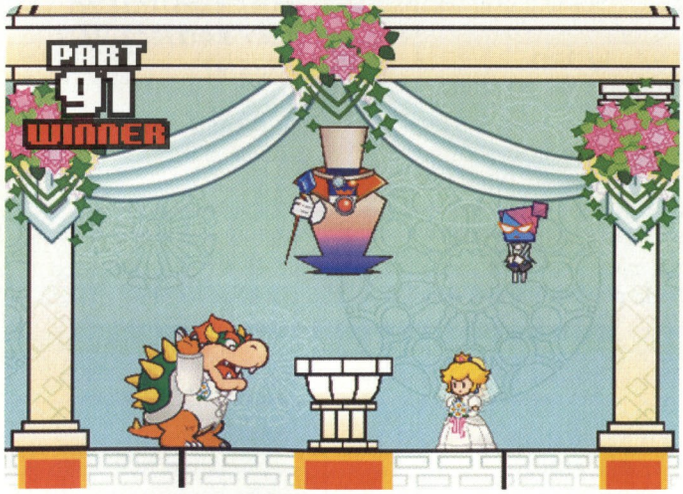
We're not sure if the PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360 are up to the task of some of your other ideas, yet, but with time and technological progression, there's no telling how far Rockstar and developers like them can push interactivity.

FAREWELL TO A GENERATION

I commend you on a mostly flawless account of Dreamcast greatness, but why include Marvel Vs.Capcom 2 when it was superseded by the likes of Capcom vs SNK 2 and Street Fighter: Third Strike? Also, as good as Virtua Fighter 3tb and Sonic Adventure were, I think any of the

CAPTION THIS!

It's a good thing we're not published by a Packer company, because then we wouldn't be able to run **Cameron Wyers'** caption...



"The wedding was a relaxed evening until Jamie Packer discovered the pre-nup wasn't countersigned."

HYPER 166 FEEDBACK

The feedback train has once again pulled into Hyper HQ, and this month's hot topics were Forza 2's review score, the freedom of the press and the awesomeness of The Darkness. All of which were ALSO ON FIRE!

JC Henderson

The Forza 2 review is going to be a good talking point. 80 given by dirk watch. I think another very good reason why numbers do suck for reviews.

HiredMan

Wow, 80% for Forza 2? This is quite puzzling... especially given the 95% that DiRT got. In my opinion Forza 2 is by far the best console racing sim ever released, certainly streets ahead of any iteration of Gran Turismo upon their respective releases (of which I'm pretty sure all have scored above Forza's score).

the_watchers_eye

Regarding Dan's editorial, it is a scary thought indeed that someone could be sued for expressing their opinion... I doubt that the precedent set will eradicate free speech in the media - that's just not going to happen. There are too many outlets for expressing opinions these days that it would be impossible to regulate all of them. Anyway, Dan, if you ever got sued for your opinion, I would totally be in your corner...

Modokun

I don't think it's that bad that people are able to sue for poor writing. If you invest 10 million in a game that really is an amazing game, and the most popular magazine in the country writes a review that doesn't represent the game at all, and nobody buys it... your out 10 million dollars... you should be able to get your

money back by one way or another.

Not only is the writer sabotaging the games creator, its also sabotaging the gaming community by taking money out of game development.

I guess that's where it comes down to substantiating your view point/opinion.

Having said that, the reviewers in Hyper give clear rationality behind their reviews so I don't think have anything to worry about.

Daniel

Gotta pull you up on that - who is to determine whether a review, a subjective exercise, doesn't accurately represent something? As long as your facts are correct then your opinion should be sacrosanct.

Scoz

Great mag guys. It astounds me that, after not seeing any of them in the western world, we are suddenly being bombarded with Atelier Iris games. I bought number one, and was planing to stick with the series but there is just so little time in between them!

But please, don't defend the PSP, as Sandsky said in the mailbag, it is inherently shite, and a handful of good games aren't going to make up for that.

Javer

Great Issue guys. All of the special features are really great. It would have been better if the issue was ALSO ON FIRE!

Lothar1

I've pretty much preached my love for The Darkness in its respective thread, but I'd like to say I agree with Daniel's review.

For me, despite the few flaws, the game was gripping and exciting from start to finish. I absolutely loved it. Well, except for the other night when I passed it on hard and didn't get the achievement For that I'm a little peeved (being a gamerscore whore and all).

Zeph101

Personally, It made me feel old reading that NES feature. Especially when they mentioned the 'Videogame crash of 1983/4' and I realised that I had lived through that.

following would have been worthier inclusions:

Crazy Taxi: The original and best.

Ecco: Defender of the Future: A Unique experience, many were put off by the sharp learning curve but the game was ultimately rewarding, the second and third chapters were mind-bogglingly amazing. A thoroughly underrated gem.

Headhunter: One of the Dreamcast's greatest swan songs, worth it for Richard Jacques score alone.

Power Stone: When Capcom reinvents the beat-em-up, you sit up and take notice

Skies of Arcadia: The finest Dreamcast RPG.

Space Channel 5: If it weren't competing against Rez and Jet Set radio, it would have been criminal to leave this off the list. Damn close though.

Virtua Tennis: Pong reborn and endlessly entertaining. Especially now that we've found out that the fishing rod controller acts much like the Wiimote in WiiSports.

House of the Dead 2: One of the last great examples of a dead genre (especially in the home).

Samba de Amigo: Come on! It's a game about a monkey and maracas, what's not to love?

Scott Gordon

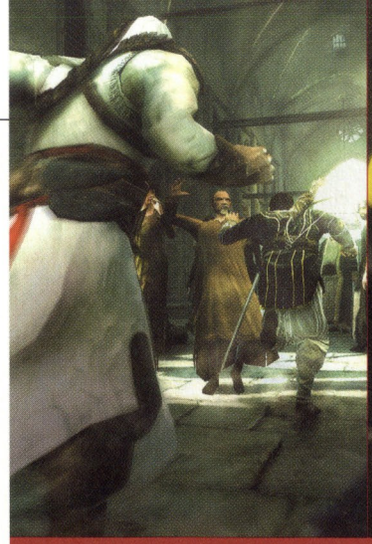
Ah the Dreamcast. Only the good die young, as they say. As for your selection of games that deserved to be on our list of the top ten games for the system, all we can say is that we wish we could have fit more than ten games into our top ten – because all of those are brilliant too.

Unfortunately, we did have to choose favourites, and among those were Sonic Adventure and Virtua Fighter 3tb. As launch titles, they really set the tone for the Dreamcast, and while some may disagree, we still think they're amazing games to play.

While on the topic of Samba de Amigo though, does anyone else think this game would work perfectly on the Wii? Something to ponder there Sega...

BEST TIME TO BE A GAMER?

I've been playing games for a few years, maybe too many, but can I say NEVER before have we had such a great looking 6 month roster. Blockbusters every month, so big, they even make fairly hyped games seem passable. July we have a taste with Forza 2, Colin McRae and The Darkness. Just a taste. Entree would be too much of a strong word to use, nibble would be more applicable.



hotseat

It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month in the Hot Seat sits the collective arses of Ubisoft Montreal and Free Radical, developers of Assassin's Creed and Haze respectively. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to the developers. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

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

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

July brings us Two Worlds and Ninja Gaiden Sigma. It's sort of like the rumble in the belly as the previous taste test begs for more. Much more, and here it comes August, one word Bioshock! Possible game of the year? If its not enough, why not have a little Stranglehold, Airborne, Lair, Moto GP 7, and possibly Warhawk.

September: Halo 3, is that big enough? Why not try EA's usually healthy supply of sports games, or even Sega Rally and the possibly great Jericho?

October: Grand Theft Auto IV, how can you have any room left? Why not have a little Call of Duty 4, or something called an Orange Box. An Orange Box wouldn't be too filling would it?

November: By now things should be easing down, but Assassins Creed and Brothers in Arms are served nice and hot! SOCOM should also arrive with Unreal Tournament 3, and possibly a filling Turning Point Fall of Liberty, but it may turn out to be another Hour of Victory.

December: Certainly eases down, but if your still hungry, dont pass up on the very underated remake Chronicles of Riddick. A much better game than The Darkness, and possibly the only movie tie in game that out does the film, a feat worthy of a purchase alone.

So a very exciting 6 months ahead, but will you have enough money, and can you fit it all in. Well done on the games industry for pumping out so much quality, possibly even too much!

M.A. Smith

Thanks for that Mr Smith, now we won't have to plan which games we'll be covering in Hyper until after December!

Seriously though, right now is a pretty sweet time to be a gamer, but the same could be (and has been) said around about this time every year.

Whether this year will indeed be the best ever is yet to be seen, but one thing we know is that some of the games on your list will be better than expected, and some will be worse than you may have first thought. Lets just play the games and see shall we?

CRACKED UP INNOVATION

Innovation, is it all its cracked up to be? As a relatively hardcore gamer, I have noticed a trend amongst the current generation of consoles. Developers and gamers alike are putting more and more emphasis on innovative gameplay, trying to make it completely original. Now whilst this isn't necessarily a bad thing, it seems that the games end

up revolving around the innovative idea. If innovation is to be used (i believe) it should be used with pre-existing formula for the genre. An example of a game that carries this out would be the 'Half Life' series. Whilst this game was innovative and original it also followed the formula for a good FPS.

I believe that developers, with the next gen's being released are trying to create entirely new genre and play styles leaving some games with an overwhelming "to be continued" feeling on the gameplay.

Alan

Well, we both agree and disagree Alan. Games that blend innovation with a tried-and-true genre can be just as brilliant, or even more brilliant, than some that attempts to create an entirely new genre unto themselves.

Games like the aforementioned Half-Life, Deus Ex, the Zelda , Mario and Metroid series, as well as a new office favourite, The Darkness, all prove that taking an idea that's proven to be both fun, and lucrative, in the past and adding new gameplay mechanics and a compelling narrative can make for a classic game.

On the other hand, we love completely innovative ideas. One game this month that surprised us was Kuju Entertainment's Crush. While on the surface the game doesn't look like much, it's also nothing like anything else we've played before. Once you start squashing the game world into different dimensions in order to solve the levels brain-straining puzzles, and following a pretty fun little story to go along with it it's clear that completely innovative ideas can be just as good as established ones.

Like we always say, innovation is the only way forward for this industry, and while more of the same may be fun in the short term, we need those new ideas to sustain the future of gaming into the long term.

SENKO NO WRONG!

Dear Mr. Branscombe, perhaps you are unaware of G.Rev's pedigree, but $120 for Senko No Ronde is not an unreasonable price for a game that was lucky to even get a local release. I had to pay through the nose for Under Defeat and close to $400 for Border Down on the Dreamcast, due to their limited Japanese releases, but they were worth every single penny. You have every right to criticise the game on it's limited single player appeal and less than perfect melee combat, but to surmise your opinion of the game based upon the price, which is more a sign of the times than the fault of the game, is disappointing and reckless. Just because it is old school in spirit does not mean that it should be pidgeon-holed in the same league as a budget re-release/remake/compilation. This is a new game, it was developed from scratch, it is innovative and offers a gaming experience that is rare in a world of beige sequels and copycats. In order to keep one of gaming's last bastions of purity alive, we need to support the too few small developer's left who have the shooting 'enka' still beating loud and proud in their hearts. I urge every 360 owner to go out and buy Senko No Ronde now and show developers that we want more variety on our gaming shelves. We want the little guys to keep on giving. We want more shoot-em ups!

Old Stoney

Take it away Moe:

Hey Stoney, point taken, but I didn't mark Senko no Ronde down because it was too expensive (although, it is... but then again, all games are these days). I gave it a very healthy score of 77, because I enjoyed it. The revolving robots and hectic bullet-dodging shoot 'em up action was excellently done, but the game was let down by its rubbish close-quarters combat and limited single-player game.

The score it earned denotes it as a good game that could have been better, but one that will still appeal to fans of the genre – and that's the score I stand by.

I certainly know how you feel about shmups though, they are definitely one of the last "pure" gaming genres, and the entire Hyper team would love to see more games of Senko no Ronde's style.

Unfortunately Senko no Ronde wasn't the game to pull shmups back into the mainstream, and giving the game a few extra percent in the vain hope that it would, somehow, spur on the production of more shoot 'em ups sometime in the future, now that would be disappointing and reckless.

PRETTY PAINTED TYRANIDS

This is a bit off topic but anyway, I just found this new hobby – painting Warhammer miniatures. Yes I know, how nerdy, that's what I thought at first till I saw some painted up, man they look sweet! So many to choose from and so many ways of painting them and it's such a challenge. When they say miniature they mean it!

Here's a pic of my first Army. I chose Tyranids to start with and I've already got a battalion of Lizardmen to assemble and paint next, looks like I'm hooked. First videogames, and now this. What do you think of my first effort?

Robyn Grellet.

Those Tyranids look pretty awesome Robyn. Quite a few of the collective Hyper team have dabbled in tabletop gaming from time to time, and can attest that painting up a full army of miniature monsters is one of the most satisfying gaming experiences you can do without a control pad or a keyboard and mouse in your hand.

It's at least twice as satisfying as passing "Go" in Monopoly, and we think it even bests a triple word score in Scrabble. Keep up the good work.

Winners!

HYPER 165

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

What are the three undeniable truths about ninjas?

1. Serve the public trust.
2. Protect the innocent.
3. Uphold the law.
- Anthony Harrap, Maida Vale, WA

1. Paper covers rock.
2. Rock crushes scissors.
3. Scissors cuts paper.
- Cpt Julian Ramsay, Speers Point, NSW

- Andrew Bodsworth, Cheltenham, VIC
- Edan Miller, Thornbury, VIC
- Ivan Mercon, Coorparoo, QLD
- Nora Ramsay, Mitcham, VIC
- Craig Graham, Curtin, ACT
- Theo Milonakos, Melbourne, VIC
- Calum Weidner, Burrumbuttock, NSW
- Neal Catania, Redfern, NSW

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

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

"The hardest stain to remove would be his smug sense of self-satisfaction."
- Paul Puccio, Reservoir, VIC

- James Watson, Coonabarabran, NSW
- Rick Thornton, Towradgi, NSW
- Don Hopkins, Cronulla, NSW
- Garrett Townsend, Ivanhoe, VIC
- Thomas Kauschke, Prospect, SA
- Lawrence Joyce, Annerley, QLD
- Lenny Maddy, Ashburton, VIC
- Mark Malpass, Walkley Heights, SA
- Nathan Weaver, Sorrento, WA

OVERLORD

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

"I'd have them infiltrate Sega's ranks to make sure a Sonic the Hedgehog game is never made EVER again."
- Craig Brown, Anula, NT

"I would dress my minons up in a suit and tie and send him off to the office...my boss wouldn't notice, would he?"
- Rick Thornton, Towradgi, NSW

- Benita Green, Warwick, QLD
- Jamie McGraw, Racecourse, QLD
- Baruday Logan, West Melbourne, VIC
- Christopher Rosiak, Yellow Rock, NSW
- Paul Jones, University of Sydney, NSW
- Thi Trinh, Sunnybank, QLD
- James Cartledge, Cooks Hill, NSW
- Allen Buddle, Redcliffe, QLD

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

- Rob Lee, Donvale, VIC ***(see pic)***
- Stephen Townsend, Tongala, VIC
- Beau Hansen, Mullumbimby, NSW
- Benjamin Rajapaksa, Richmond, VIC
- Glenn Jackson, Kippa-Ring, QLD

FORUM TALK

cube_punk
Rock Band
Oh man [Rock Band looks] AWESOME! My interest in this game has just jumped to 1,000,000%.

The drums look grouse, except I think the hi-hat and snare should be swapped to mimic a real drum kit. Having the snare in the 'red' position and the hi-hat in the 'green' position would work better I think.

I so can't wait for this game. I'm buying the drums first, then using my Guitar Hero axe until I can pick up the Rock Band one.

Bob the Destroyer
World of Warcraft
Ding 70 finally. Now I have a 70 Prot Warrior and a 70 Holy Paladin meaning I can't kill anything for shit.

darklord
Gears of War coming to PC
Yep it's finally coming to PC with extra content. I bet it'll be vista only which sucks because I'd like to try it on PC and I only have XP so I hope it will allow it but we'll have to wait and see.

heatZor
Gears of War coming to PC
Sweet, no need for a 360 at all. Now I just need Mass Effect to come to PC.

ireadtabloids
Resident Evil Umbrella Chronicles + RE4 Wii Edition
Has anyone seen the price of Resi 4 on Wii in America? $30 US!

Price in Australia: $80 Aus. Why couldn't it be reasonably priced at $55-$60?

It's not like they developed a new game! Screw buying it at that price.

dioramaofthe808
was going to buy ps3 this week... then I read about USD $100 pricedrop
Well, that's it... Sony just lost a customer. I thought I'd get one with all the sales going round but having just done a fund conversion, that's so much cheaper - about $660ish vs our $980++. and the yanks get the 5 free BluRays too.

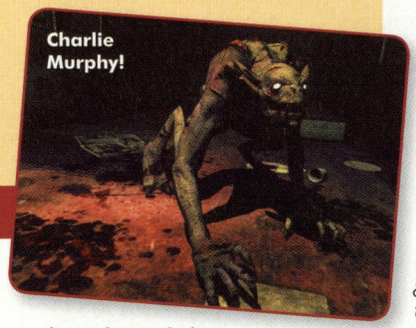
Tuki
was going to buy ps3 this week... then I read about USD $100 pricedrop
Why would anyone want to buy an Aussie PS3 anyways? Importing is cheaper and doesn't detract from the overall package.

Why complain about Australia being screwed over if all you have to do is import? It comes off as a little whiny when people complain about something that's completely avoidable. It's like Superman complaining about bad traffic. JUST FLY YOU WHINY BASTARD!

El Presidente
The Darkness (avail 29/6/07)
There is an achievement for sitting on the couch long enough for your girl to snuggle which snags you the romance achievement but that's only about 2 - 3 mins you need to sit, you don't need to watch the whole movie.

Incidently, sitting on the couch is one of the most effective uses of first person perspective I've seen in a very very long time. It is hard to explain but I'm sure when you guys have done the scene it will impress you too.

Voltron
The Darkness (avail 29/6/07)
Heres a tip: dont kill the dude in the shed in the cemetery right at the start.... you need him in chapter 5 for a side quest if you want to get the achievement called "help those in need".



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SENOR SPIELBERGO

Dear Hyper crew.

I too am excited about the war of the worlds on stage... I've always believed the sound track was designed just for this and it amazes me it's taken so long.

I am a fan of the sound track and the book, but the Tom Cruise movie was rubbish. A typical piss weak Hollywood ending. Shame on you Senor Spielbergo.

Jason

Wilks here – you took the words right out of my mouth. Senor Spielbergo and the Scientologist midget really screwed the pooch on War of the Worlds. Why is it that an audience can't buy an alien invasion without a hero. I was willing to go with the movie in the beginning because all Tom "definitely not gay" Cruise did was run away from stuff but when he, not the heroic soldier, fed the tripod a bunch of grenades I threw my hands up in disgust. From then on it was action hero man saving the world and pointing out the obvious. Why did he have to be the one to point out the birds on the dying tripod? Does Spielbergo have as little faith and love for the audience as Mr. Beardy? Seems like it to me.

Jeff Wayne's musical is awesome though. Awesomely awesome. As was the RTS based on the musical. Aside from the fact that it was a little too easy to win as the tripods. OK, so maybe the RTS wasn't awesomely awesome but it still was pretty damn good.

SHOPPING IN JAPAN

Again your features are well and truly awesome! The feature by Jonti Davies (Shopping in Japan, Issue #165) was brilliant! Well written and on the money with everything. My wife is Japanese and is also a gamer as well. She read it and enjoyed a laugh about all the crazy things Otaku life is in Japan. Also the pictures were really good, and showed exactly how it is.

It brought back memories of the same places I have visited recently. I encourage any Hyper reader to visit Japan, it's the closest thing to experiencing being on an alien planet! Instead of playing a game in one!

Thanks again for a great read,

Cheers,

Cameron

Thanks for the good word Cameron, we enjoyed putting that feature together as much as you enjoyed reading it, that's for sure. While Hyper's man in Japan, Jonti Davies, lives there full-time, a good number of the rest of the Hyper team have taken that same trip across the ocean, while those that haven't yet had the privilege just wish they could.

Malky's most favourite part of his Japanese trip was visiting a five-level toy store in Ginza, while Wilks, ever the outsider, just adored the feeling of complete alienation from everyone around him. He did like the food as well though.

INSERT CHOSEN BEVERAGE

For those of you rightly crying into your *insert chosen beverage here* about the pricing of the PS3 in Australia, take a moment to spare a thought for us Kiwis...

The PS3 sells in NZ for $1199 (AU$1,081). At the same time, we also get paid less. (Minimum wage = $11.25p/h). While in general our living costs are lower, in the case of a retail item like the PS3 it means we would have to work more hours to earn enough to purchase one, even if the cost was reduced to NZ$999 - let alone the extra $200!

Obviously we're all getting ripped anyway with the mutilation of the console's backwards compatibility, especially given US consumers pay the equivalent of about NZ$782 for their undamaged systems (I won't even get started on that.) but at least you can rest easy in the knowledge that there's someone out there even worse off than you(!)

Anyways on a more positive note, it's great to see Moe joining your ranks, the Engrish feature in issue #164 made me laugh till I stopped. Keep up the good work Hyper and don't forget you have an appreciative audience over the Tasman too.

Richard

We could never forget that we've got an appreciative audience over the Tasman Rich, especially with top letters like this one turning up in our mailbag.

Anyway, as we all know, there is a big problem with the pricing of the PlayStation 3 console in PAL territories, but by the looks of it kiwis may just be getting the rawest deal of them all.

Slowly though, PS3 price drops will come into effect. The States already have a temporary one planned for the 60GB PS3 when the new 80GB console is released, and although Australia will apparently not see a similar price drop, it's encouraging to see someone getting the console for cheaper.

Additionally, with the introduction of the 80GB PS3 system in the USA, Sony are discontinuing the 60GB PS3, and the Emotion Engine along with it.

At least America will soon feel the anguish of having the same software backwards compatibility we've had since launch.

The Passion of the Gamer

The Adventures of Dippy

By Dylan Burns

The dulcet tones of the game's voice-over character reach my ears for the first time. It's a voice I know, seeing as it's played by Stewart Patrick, an actor in the excellent TV series Planet Journey: The Third Generation. I'm so excited because this game, Never Dagger Gate 3, has been in production for eight years and I remember reading that the developers actually travelled back in time to see what it was really like in medieval times. Apparently, the lead programmer was beheaded in an unfortunate tavern misunderstanding.

"Four-score and more years ago," the prologue dialogue informs me, and my heart swells with excitement at the awesome adventure about to greet me, "the lands of Obsidian fell into ruins. The Dark Lords coveted the power of the crystals and in a battle lasting many years a band of heroes successfully wrested from the Dark Lords each crystal in turn."

"Awesome!" I say to the monitor. There's a pause for effect and then the story continues.

"I am the last Emperor of Clamydial, and as its ruler I charge you with collecting up these crystals and delivering them unto me so that we may prepare for the coming darkness."

I'm greeted with a five minute cut scene showing the battle of Obsidian and the destruction caused by the Dark Lords all over Clamydial. I'm pumped and ready to start playing, but first it's character creation time.

I choose a male-orc-dwarf-halfling and get to tweaking his facial features. Then I need to choose a star sign. I go with The Rabbit because it gives me +10 eyesight and the ability to shoot little brown pebbles at enemies. Next up is the spell selection screen, where over seven thousand separate spell upgrade paths greet my widened eyes.

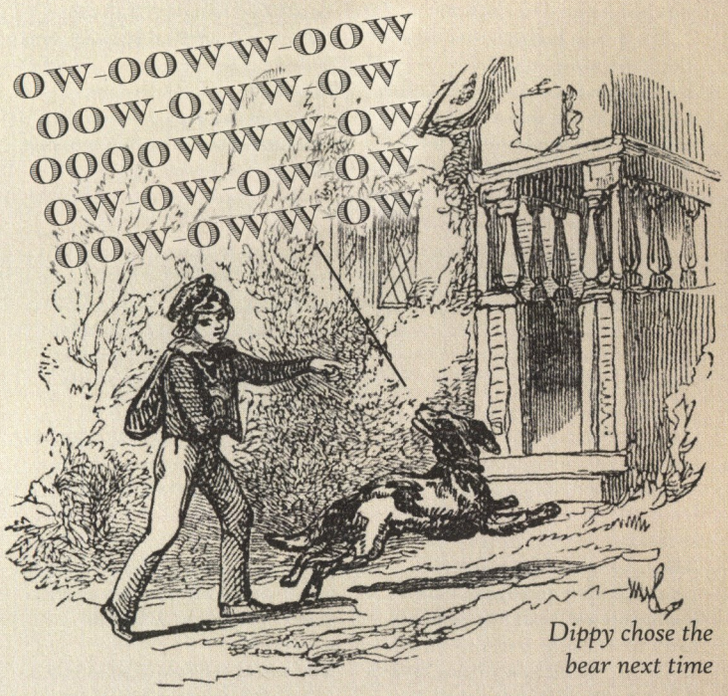
Man, the developers put so much effort into this game! My heart is still beating wildly as I chance a glance at the box art for Never Dagger Gate 3 (the box is propped against the wall for inspiration). I take in the stylised, embossed '3' and the picture of a dragon's mouth enveloping the capitalised title, flames shooting violently towards the viewer. This game rocks so much and I haven't even gotten into it yet.

Back to the spell list. I choose my seventeen major spells and thirty minor ones, making certain to include Hobo's Rage and Dutch Oven of Fear, two of my favourite spells from NDG2, which took me six years to complete. It's then time to create a companion for my character, whom I've named Dippy. I'm torn between a bear and a wolf. I had a wolf in NDG1 (which took only four years to complete) and found its constant howling somewhat annoying. I opt for the bear and am taken to a totally separate menu where I can now tweak my pet in aspects such as body type, teeth structure, underlying bone density and special moves.

After that, it's time for a break. I have, after all, been 'playing' for eight hours. I estimate that another three days of option screens should see me through the important set-up phase of the game and then I'll actually get to play as Dippy and explore Clamydial.

The next few days fly by, a whirlwind of character background creation and family lineage options, with my excitement reaching a crescendo as I finally step into the game world for the first time. Seventeen continents, forty-seven major cities and over sixteen thousand NPCs are all mine to explore and exploit.

The best part about the Never Dagger Gate series is how realistic it is. I mean, just now I went over to a shopkeeper and stole some mushrooms and just like that, out of nowhere, a palace guard came up and arrested me. Then, after a short minigame involving police background checks,



Dippy chose the bear next time

I'm free to once again roam the land. It's just like what happened to Paris Hilton. So realistic.

Next up is a spot of fishing. Not only do you have to find and equip a fishing rod in NDG3, but unless you have the right level of dexterity and strength you'll never succeed in attaching bait to the hook, nor will your arms have the strength to pull back on the rod, in itself a minigame involving a keen eye and smooth mouse strokes. As I said, it's realistic... and totally immersive.

So anyway, weeks pass and I must say that my obsession with NDG3 is starting to wane a little. I think I've realised that I'm not actually playing it at all. In fact, I seem to remember only seventeen seconds of actual freedom, the rest of the many weeks being filled with linear task fulfilment or endless option boxes, not to mention the character conversation wheel (which requires an actual wheel peripheral with force feedback).

Perhaps the developers thought that if they crammed as many features as possible into the game it would account for gameplay, especially given the vast land size, many individual inhabitants and the brand new physics system.

And now I hear on the grapevine that Winterfall Heroes 6, NDG3's main competitor, is on the cusp of being released, and that it only took three years to develop. Apparently it's not as deep as NDG3 but comes with, and I quote, "A main quest that will actually have you playing it within seven hours... that's a lot sooner than Never Dagger Gate games!"

My dilemma now becomes which route to take. Do I invest all of my time into NDG3 or do I abandon all of those hours that I've sunk into it and convert to WH6? Obviously, I don't have time for both, so I'll just have to stick with NDG3. After all, it does have an awesome stat-tracking system. Why just last week I discovered that I've clicked the left mouse button 78, 934 times, and that my most popular option is 'next option". Now, where did I put that conversation wheel peripheral?

gameboffin@hotmail.com

THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Transformers	Action
2	▼	Sing Star Pop Hits Bundle	Family
3	◆	AFL Premiership 2007	Sports
4	▲	Eyetoy Sports Bundle Ptm	Family
5	▼	Buzz: The Mega Quiz Bundle	Family
6	▲	Guitar Hero 2 Bundle	Family
7	▼	Buzz Junior Robojam Bundle	Family
8	◆	FIFA 2007	Sports
9	▼	God Of War 2	Action
10	◆	Singstar Legends Bundle	Family

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Pokémon Diamond	RPG
2	▲	Pokémon Pearl	RPG
3	✪	More Brain Training	Family
4	▲	Dr Kawashima's Brain Train	Family
5	▼	Ice Age 2 The Meltdown	Action
6	▼	Spyro Shadow Legacy	RPG
7	◆	Cars	Adventure
8	◆	Shrek The Third	Adventure
9	▲	Catz 2006	Simulator
10	▼	Bratz Forever Diamonds	Adventure

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition	Action
2	◆	Zelda Twilight Princess	RPG
3	◆	Mario Strikers Charged	Sports
4	▲	Red Steel	Action
5	◆	Sonic And The Secret Rings	Adventure
6	▼	Harry Potter Order/Phoenix	Adventure
7	▲	Rayman Raving Rabbids	Adventure
8	▼	Mortal Kombat Armageddon	Action
9	◆	GT Pro Series	Racing
10	◆	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing

TOP 10 Playstation 3 Games Over $60

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Formula One Champ Edition	Racing
2	◆	Motorstorm	Racing
3	▼	Rainbow Six Vegas	Action
4	▼	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
5	✪	Ninja Gaiden Sigma	Action
6	◆	Call Of Duty 3	Action
7	◆	Fight Night Round 3	Action
8	▲	Virtua Tennis 3	Sports
9	▲	Fear	Action
10	▼	Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion	RPG

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Sims 2	Strategy
2	▲	The Sims 2: Pets	Strategy
3	▲	World Of Warcraft	RPG
4	▼	The Sims 2: Seasons	Strategy
5	▲	Age Of Empires III	Strategy
6	▼	The Sims 2 Fashion Stuff	Strategy
7	▲	WoW: Burning Crusade	RPG
8	▼	The Sims 2: Nightlife	Strategy
9	▲	Transformers	Action
10	▼	The Sims 2 Glamour Life	Strategy

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Transformers	Action
2	▼	Forza Motorsport 2	Racing
3	◆	Colin Mcrae Dirt	Racing
4	◆	The Darkness	Action
5	▲	Rainbow Six Vegas	Action
6	✪	Overlord	RPG
7	▲	Guitar Hero 2 Bundle	Family
8	▼	C & C 3: Tiberium Wars	Strategy
9	▲	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
10	▲	Armored Core 4	Action

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Pokémon Diamond	Nintendo DS
2	▲	Transformers (Act)	PlayStation 2
3	▲	Pokémon Pearl	Nintendo DS
4	◆	Sing Star Pop Hits Bundle	PlayStation 2
5	✪	More Brain Training	Nintendo DS
6	▲	Dr Kawashima's Brain Train	Nintendo DS
7	◆	AFL Premiership 2007	PlayStation 2
8	▲	Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition	Nintendo Wii
9	▲	Eyetoy Sports Bundle Ptm	PlayStation 2
10	▼	Ice Age 2 The Meltdown	Nintendo DS

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 15th July 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Ratchet & Clank Size Matters	Adventure
2	◆	Harry Potter Order/Phoenix	Adventure
3	▲	WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 07	Sports
4	▲	V8 Supercars 3 Shootout	Racing
5	▲	Socom 2 Us Navy Seals 2	Action
6	▲	Virtua Tennis 3	Sports
7	▲	Burnout Dominator	Racing
8	▲	FIFA 2006 World Cup	Sports
9	▼	Pirates Of The Caribbean 3	Adventure
10	▲	Dragonball Z: Shin Budokai 2	Action

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

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Next Issue:

HANDS-ON SPECIAL!

We go hands-on with all the latest and greatest games, including Time Shift, Heavenly Sword, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Folklore, Kane & Lynch, Pro Evo 2008 and hopefully a little something called GTA IV

PLUS: Blue Dragon, Donkey Kong: Bongo Blast, a look back at the Neo Geo and a whole lot more!

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