XBOX 360 » PS3 » Wii » PC » PS2 » XBOX » PSP » DS

HYPER»

PS3 DELAYED!
Australia forsaken...

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Our exclusive chat with Blizzard about
THE BURNING CRUSADE

PLUS:
ZELDA
Fresh screens!

Wii LAUNCH

Australian release date & price announced!

CANIS CANEM EDIT
BULLWORTH ACADEMY

BULLY

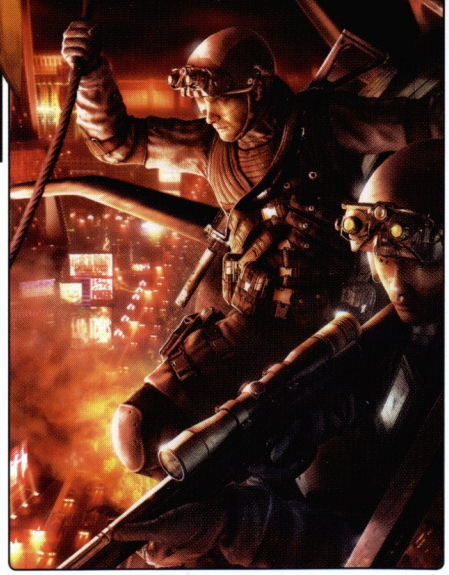
It's a Canis Canem Edit world on PS2!

REVIEWS

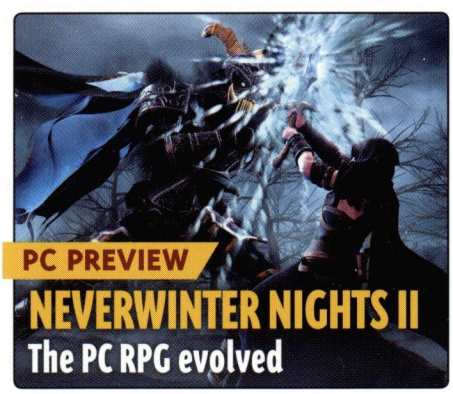
- Just Cause PC/Xbox 360
- Company of Heroes PC
- Test Drive Unlimited X360
- MGS 3: Subsistence PS2
- Starfox Command DS
- Pokémon Red/Blue DS/GBA

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

We hit Sin City for the scoop



X360/PS3 HANDS-ON
TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8
Re-built for next-gen systems



PC PREVIEW
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS II
The PC RPG evolved

A next MAGAZINE
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RESTRICTED
Strong Violence,
Strong Coarse Language,
Strong Drug Use,
Sexual References

PlayStation.Portable

18 WORLD OF WARCRAFT: The Burning Crusade

Blizzard take the biggest game in the world and make it even more compelling...

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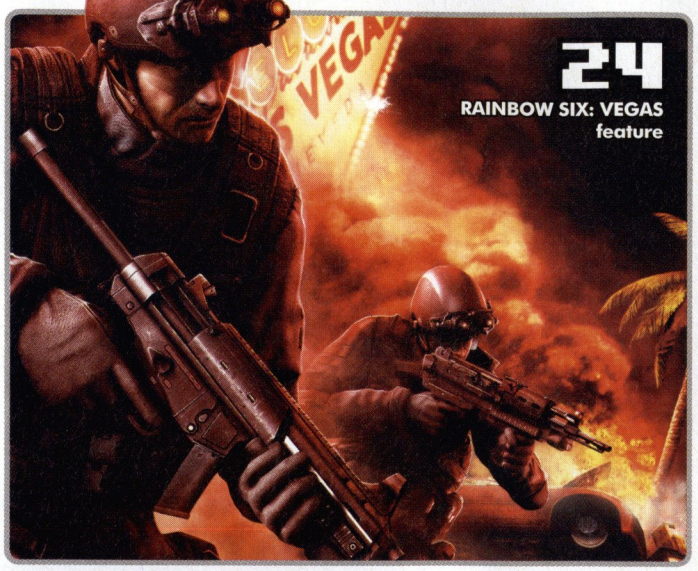

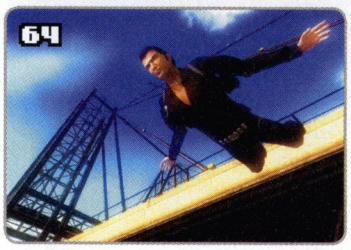

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SUBSCRIBE & WIN A MASSIVE STACK OF ANIME DVDs! PAGE 16!

EDITORIAL

[up] Cam has lost his tan due to hours spent at the craps table

>> We're as disappointed as you guys are that Sony have bailed out of a worldwide launch for the PS3, but to be honest it's hardly surprising. We've been waiting for this announcement for months, as not only is a worldwide launch a logistical nightmare, but in terms of manufacturing it was always going to be an uphill battle producing enough units to satisfy one territory, let alone them all. Taking the Xbox 360 launch as an example, Microsoft were able to get into the major territories (minus Australia of course) within a few weeks of one another, but the upshot of that was crippling shortages of the machine in retail, particularly in the states. Not only is the PS3 quite a bit more complicated to manufacture, but you can bet the demand for it in Japan is going to be huge.

Will missing the Christmas period in Australia and Europe affect Sony's market share for this generation? Quite possibly. Xbox 360 will now be two Christmases ahead of PS3 in Europe, and with true second gen titles hitting shelves, there should be plenty to entice Australian consumers to pick one up this Christmas. Even so, it will most likely be 2007 and 2008 that will decide the outcome.

While it's disappointing, we can't help but be upbeat here in Hyperland. As I write this I'm a day away from hopping on a plane to go over to Japan for Tokyo Game Show, and along with Daniel Staines and our Japanese Correspondent, we're going to have three people covering the event. The PS3 may be delayed, but we're going to be getting great hands on time with the games, and plenty of opportunities to talk to the developers. Then, in a week or so, Wilks will be heading over to Barcelona to X06 to cover all the biggest Xbox 360 games on the horizon. From what we've been told this is going to be the biggest X event yet, so again, plenty to get excited about. Last but certainly not least, we're on the verge of getting our hands on review code for a number of Wii titles. The floodgates are about to open in the race to Christmas 2006, and we'll be there with the best coverage of any games mag in Australia.

For now though, kick back and enjoy the issue!

Cam Shea >> Editor

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Rainbow Six: Vegas – Xbox 360
   "Three men versus a terrorist army. I like those odds"
2. Tony Hawk's Project 8 – Xbox 360
3. Bit Generations – GBA
4. Power Stone – PSP
5. Ridge Racer 2 – PSP

Malcolm Campbell - Art Director
1. Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins – PSP
   "Great, but needed more Red Arramers"
2. LEGO Star Wars 2 – PS2
3. Quake – Mac
4. Yakuza – PS2
5. Bit Generations – GBA

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. Just Cause – Xbox 360
   "Rico Suavez is only here for the women"
2. Tony Hawk's Project 8 – Xbox 360
3. Suikoden V – PS2
4. Defcon – PC
5. World of Warcraft – PC

Tim Henderson - Some Guy
1. Broken Sword: The Angel of Death – PC
   "Must reunite George with Nico..."
2. Wild Earth: Photo Safari - PC
3. Pikmin 2 - GCN
4. Darwinia - PC
5. Sonic 3 - Megadrive

HYPER>>

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Wade Barker
Navy Electronic Technician

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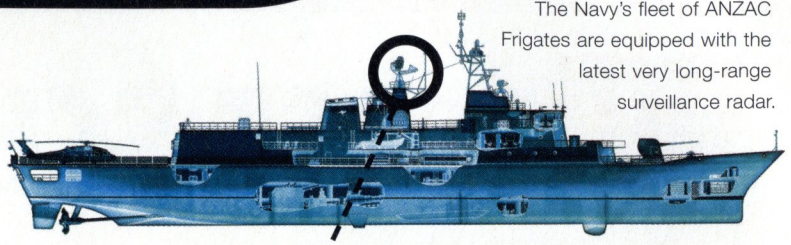

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The power output of the ANZAC's search radar equates to over 300 microwave ovens.

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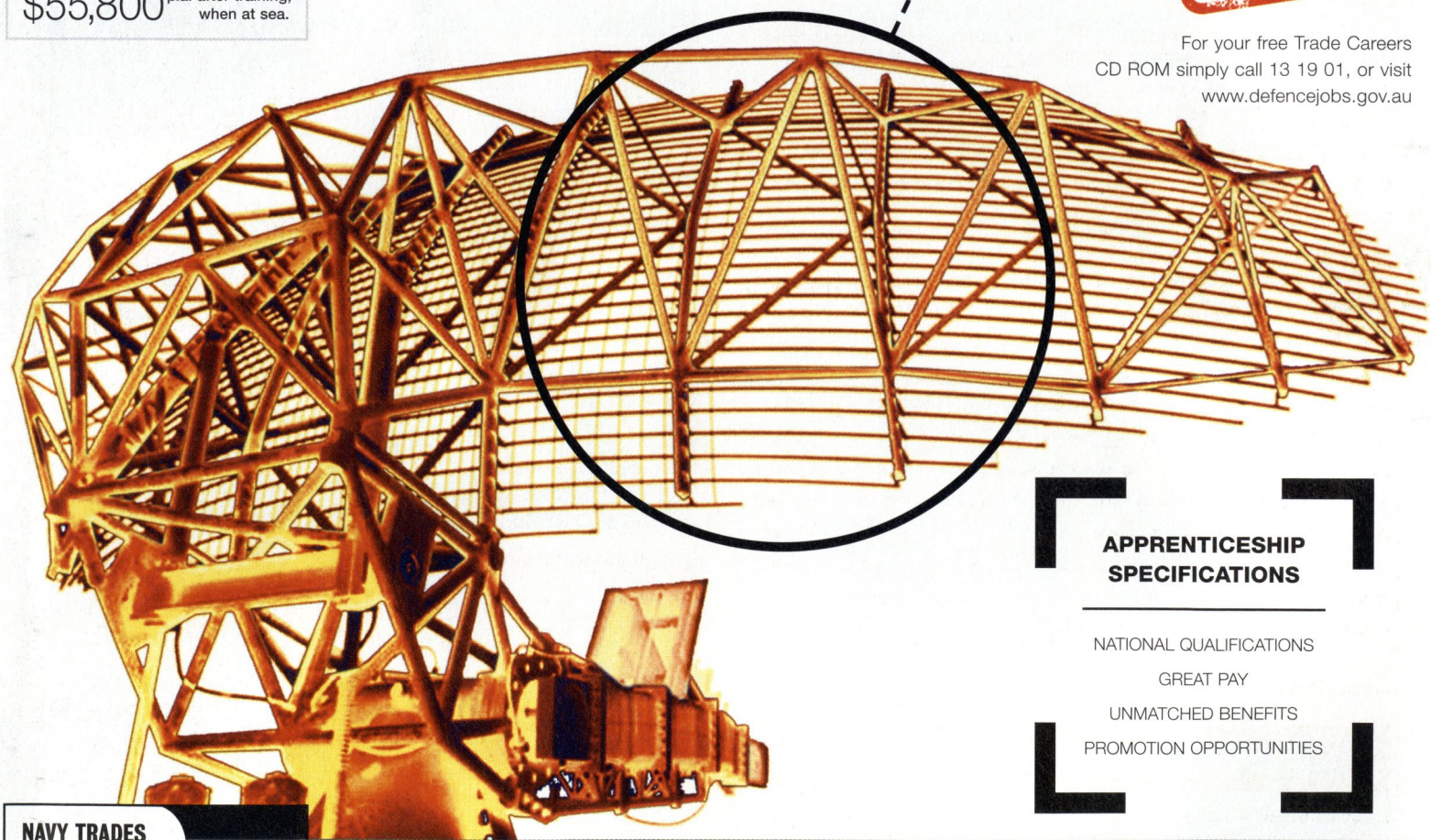

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News»

MERRY XMAS!

WiiLEASE SCHEDULE

Nintendo prepare for lift-off

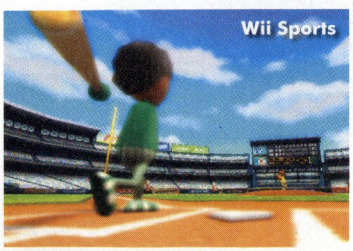
» Be ready for it Ninty fanboys. Nintendo have finally come forward and announced the launch date and pricing structure of their innovative new console. The Wii will be hitting our shores (and shelves) on December 7th of this year at a consumer minded price point of $399.95. While this is a little more expensive than some estimates have put it, the Wii still clocks in as being $250 cheaper than its cheapest contemporary, the Xbox 360, making it rather remarkable value for money. Aside from the core console the Wii will ship with one Wiimote controller, one Nunchuk (their spelling, not ours) controller extension and the Wii Sports bundle which has now been extended to include Tennis, Baseball, Golf, Bowling (we can't wait for this one) and Boxing.

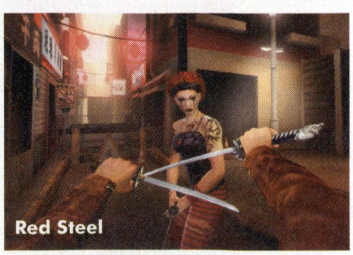
Obviously hedging their bets to work around some potential game release delays, Nintendo are saying that the console will launch with around 20 titles such as Excite Truck, The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and third party games such as Red Steel, Rayman: Raving Rabbids, Need For Speed: Carbon, Cars, Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam and Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz. Prices for additional peripherals have not been announced for our territory as yet but judging by the European pricing scheme an extra Wiimote should set you back around $70 and an extra Nunchuk around $35. A similar price to the Nunchuk should be charged for the "Classic" controller. If our release is the same as the European release a multiplayer package called Wii Play will be available at launch and will include a Wiimote and a multiplayer game compilation. Pricing on this bundle is yet to be confirmed.

In addition to the launch titles, the Wii will be fully backwards compatible will all Gamecube games and will have around 15 classic Nintendo games available to download through Virtual Console. Wii owners will also be able to create their own avatars that can be used to chat or can be imported directly into some games, check the weather and the local news online.

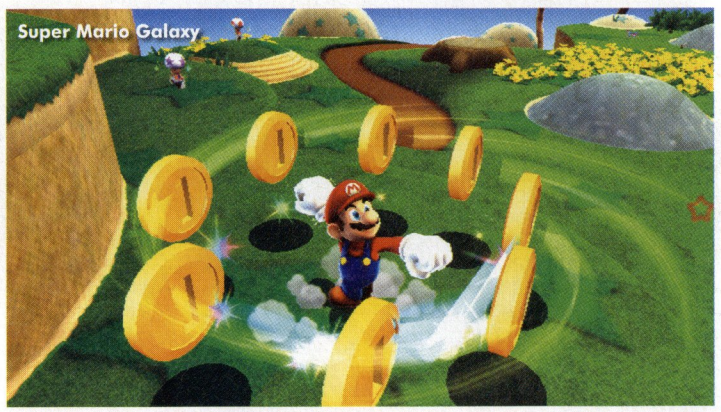
It has also been announced that contrary to earlier opinions and hints, the Nintendo Wii will not actually have a DVD playback feature. Although there has been a little backlash on this topic after the American release announcement, the lack of DVD features proves to be a rather smart move on Nintendo's behalf. The proliferation of DVD players and devices capable of DVD playback (including computers and other consoles) almost guarantees that a consumer in the market to buy the Wii will already have access to a DVD player, and the decision not to include the function means that Nintendo do not have to pay any licensing fees during the manufacture of the console, increasing the profit margin of the Wii. Reggie Phils-Amie has been quoted as saying, "We will make a profit on the entire Wii proposition out of the box - hardware and software". If this is true then Nintendo is in a very strong position in the coming year.

While the lack of DVD playback isn't much of a disappointment, it has also been announced that contrary to earlier statements the Nintendo Wii will actually be region locked. Hopefully Nintendo will soon release another press release contradicting themselves again and announce that this is not true but in all honesty we're not holding our breath.


Wii Sports


Red Steel

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess


Super Mario Galaxy

CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with **Caption This Part 84** in the subject line.

Giggity

SONY

PS3 DELAYED

Kuturagi to blame?

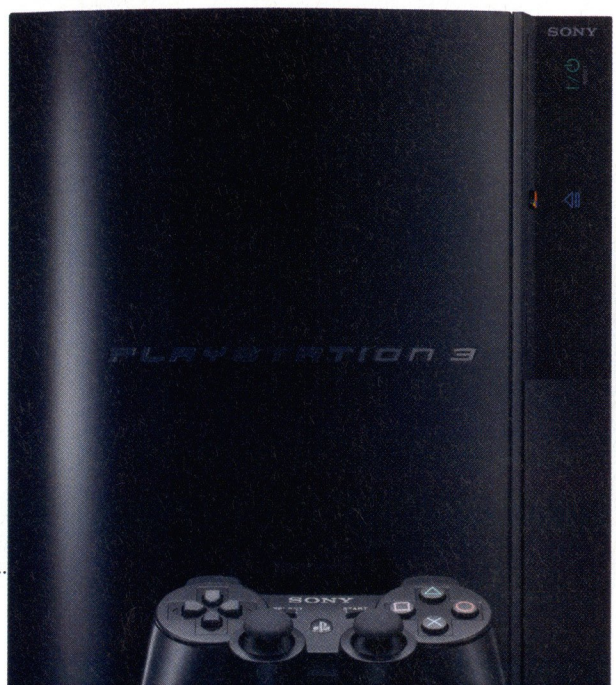
Sony have recently announced that, despite promising a worldwide release in November at their official press conference at E3, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Africa and Australasia (PAL territories) will in fact not be getting PS3 consoles shipped to their territories until March 2007. The reason given for this reshuffling of releases (and release promises) is that Sony have not been able to manufacture enough units to fill demand. In fact reports claim that Sony may be launching with as few as 500,000 units (with more to follow soon after), a far cry from the 2+ million that were hinted at previously. While Australians are by no means newcomers when it comes to be shafted on release schedules, the decision for Sony to delay the release here comes as a little bit of a surprise – at least in a business sense.

The Xbox 360 had the most successful launch of any console in Australia with 80,000 units shipping in five months. Going further than that, the Xbox 360 has shipped five million units worldwide since launch making it the fastest selling global launch ever. The success of the 360 in our territory would indicate to us that Sony would want to release the console, even in limited numbers, for the lucrative Christmas sales period so as not to give Microsoft another uncontested Christmas in the market. Before any Nintendo fans get their knickers in a twist, neither Sony nor Microsoft seem to be treating the Wii as a direct competitor, hence the claim of an "uncontested" Christmas.

Sony's inability to manufacture enough blue laser diodes, a key component in the PS3s Blu-Ray player (itself touted as one of the major selling points of the console) is but one of multiple indicators that Sony is having problems with manufacturing. Shortly prior to the announcement of the PS3 delay, Sony were forced to recall around six million laptop batteries they had supplied to Dell and Apple that were faulty and caused the computers to overheat. Even Ken Kutaragi, a man not generally known for his humility or even for his completely understandable comments has been quoted as saying, "If you asked me if Sony's strength in hardware was in decline, right now I guess I would have to say that might be true". Sony has traditionally traded on the financial success of the PlayStation brand to help buoy development of riskier electronic products. The massive amount of money that Sony have sunk so far into the PS3 and the delays are hinting that the PS3 may be one of these riskier electronic products itself. Some commentators have even gone so far as to say that Sony are staking the entire company on the success of the PS3.

Although not a sign of the apocalypse by any sense of the term it is interesting that so far Sony have remained quite tight lipped about the PS3 as far as advertising is concerned. At a similar stage of release anticipation with the PS2 Sony bombarded the media with all manner of hype, including the rather obtuse but memorable "The Third Place" campaign (who could forget the guy with the duck head or the bleeding mummy guy). Could this be a sign that Sony is taking a more serious approach to this console launch, fearing that delays and manufacturing shortfalls could damage the brand so have not chosen to make arrogant and outrageous statements?

On a lighter note, in early September rumours began to circulate that Sony were going to be implementing the Viacom property Xfire (a PC suite with many capabilities similar to those of Xbox Live) in the PS3. As exciting as this news was Sony have been quick to debunk the myth, stating that only one game in the company's lineup, Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom, may use Xfire.



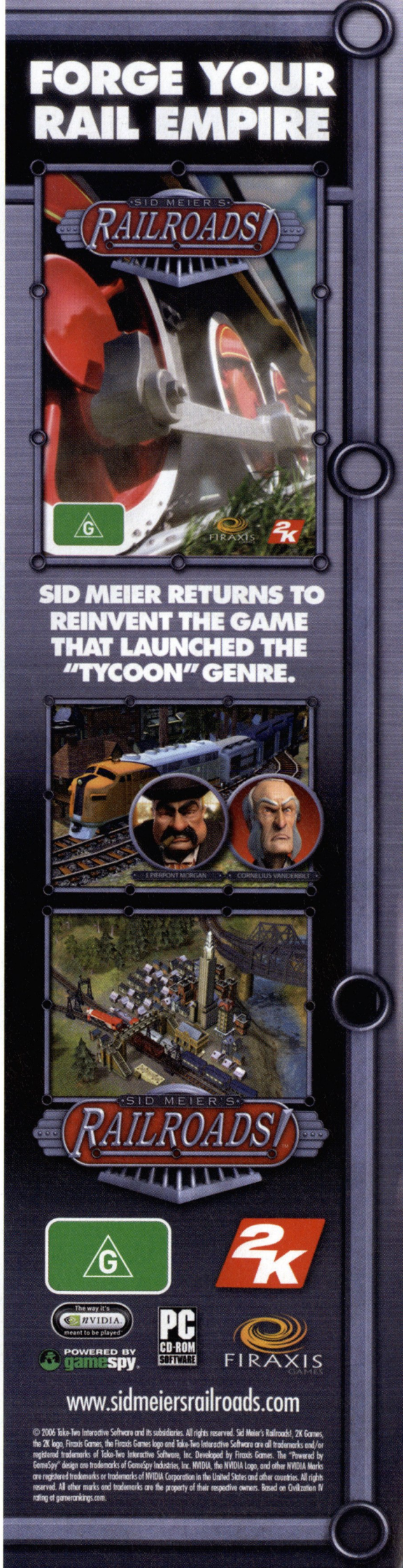
OVERFLOW

If you pick up this issue in its first week on sale, then it may not be too late to get along to **http://www.xbox.com/en-AU/community/competitions/** to register to become one of the first consumers in the country to play Call of Duty 3! Registration closes October 10... better get cracking! Or invent a time machine if you're too late.

The IEAA recently announced new figures (compiled by GfK Australia) on game and hardware sales for the first half of 2006. Overall sales came in at $343 million, up 8% on the year before. The biggest driving force, however, was increased sales in the handheld sector – sales were up 56% on the same period last year, to $68 million.

Looks like Double Fine, developers of the amazing (apart from the last level) Pyschonauts, are back on the scene. They've announced that Vivendi Games will be publishing their next title, although we don't know anything about it as yet. In other news, as of October Psychonauts will be available over Steam.

Now that the PS3 controller has lost the rumble function it can't very well be called the Dual Shock now can it? Rumours online say the new title will be the "SixAxis", referring to its motion sensitivity. True or false? We'll find out soon enough.

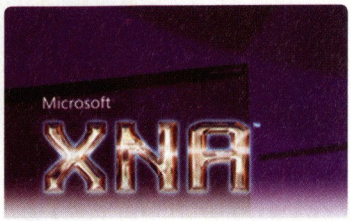


ZEN

MICROTUBE

The next generation...

With the imminent release of the HD-DVD add-on for the Xbox 360 there are rumours flying around that the console may well have a face-lift in store as early as mid 2007. Many pundits are theorising that the next iteration of the Xbox 360 may feature a built in HD-DVD player. It looks as though these rumours, not as yet debunked by Microsoft and their refusal to comment on rumours policy, were started by Mark Whittard, General Manager of Toshiba Information Systems here in Australia when he said he "would imagine that there are plans in place to put an HD-DVD drive internally in future revisions of the product".



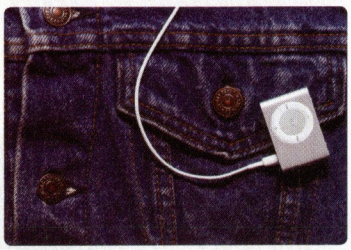
In other Microsoft news, Microsoft Corp. have launched a consumer version of their Xbox 360 game creation tool XNA Framework. XNA Game Studio Express as the pared back software is called will cost consumers an annual fee of $99USD and will require a Windows PC to run. The final games can be made available to share over Xbox Live. Peter Moore, VP of Microsoft described the service as being "our first step of creating a YouTube for video games".

IPOD

AN APPLE A DAY

New models unveiled

Apple have made some big announcements in the last week when it comes to the iPod and phenomenally successful online music store iTunes. Apple will be releasing a new 80Gb model of their successful player, an 8Gb version of the Nano as well as an even more miniscule version of the iPod Shuffle. Named the iPod Shuffle Nano, the new player has a footprint around the size of a book of matches and will hold 1Gb of music. It will also undoubtedly be the single most

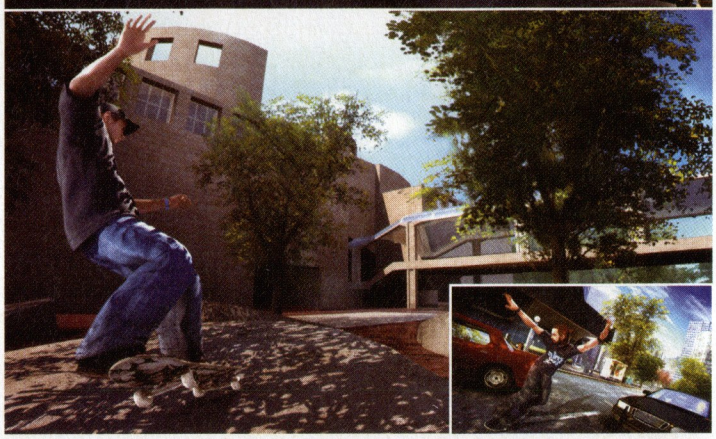


frequently lost music player this Christmas season. The iTunes service will also be hosting some new content in the coming months. Simple games will become available through the download service such as Mahjong and Tetris for a cost of around $4.99 per download. These games will take full advantage of the colour screens in the newer iPod models but we imagine will be hampered by the somewhat clumsy implementation of controls.

First Look!

DUE: 2007

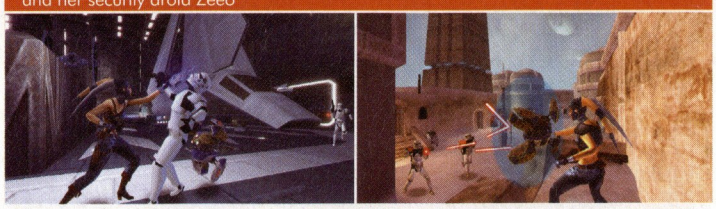
SKATE Next Gen consoles **Developer:** TBC
The Hype: "Brand new next gen skating game with Danny Way on board. Boo ya!"



First Look!

DUE: December

STAR WARS: LETHAL ALLIANCE DS/PSP **Developer:** Ubisoft Casablanca, Ubisoft Montreal **The Hype:** "Collaborative gameplay as both Twi'lek Rianna Saren and her security droid Zeeo"



New Screens!

DUE: Late 2006

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007 PC/PS3 **Developer:** Epic Games **The Hype:** "The most visually stunning and in-depth Unreal Tournament game to-date." (And no, we don't know why there are War of the Worlds tripods in the screenshots.)

Winners!

HYPER 155

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA ANTHOLOGY

- Robert Sakaluk, Yagoona West, NSW
- Michael Ward, Smithfield, QLD
- L. Turner, New Gisborne, VIC
- Benita Green, Warwick, QLD
- Alexander Barinoff, Panania, NSW
- Calum J. Weidner, Burrumbuttock, NSW
- Gabe Aguirre, Greenslopes, QLD
- Paul Wyatt, Worongary, QLD

EUREKA SEVEN

- Jenny Chaff, Greta, NSW
- Kyle Johnson, Taree, NSW
- Connor Wheatley, Macquarie Hills, NSW
- Duncan Campbell, Conder, ACT
- Daniel Beraldo, Werribee, VIC
- Ted Kemp, Doncaster East, VIC
- Sab Atino, Kedron, QLD
- Phil Ramsay, Mitcham, VIC
- Duncan Collins, Kangaroo Point, QLD
- Tom Jackson, Stones Corner, QLD

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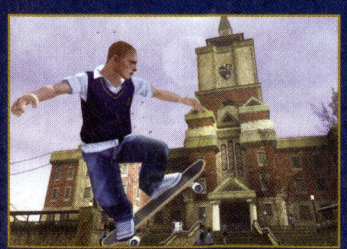
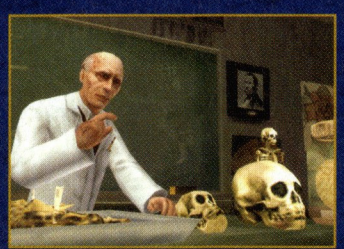
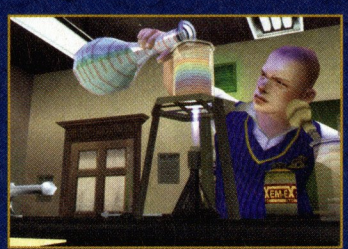
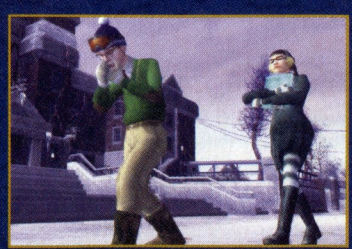

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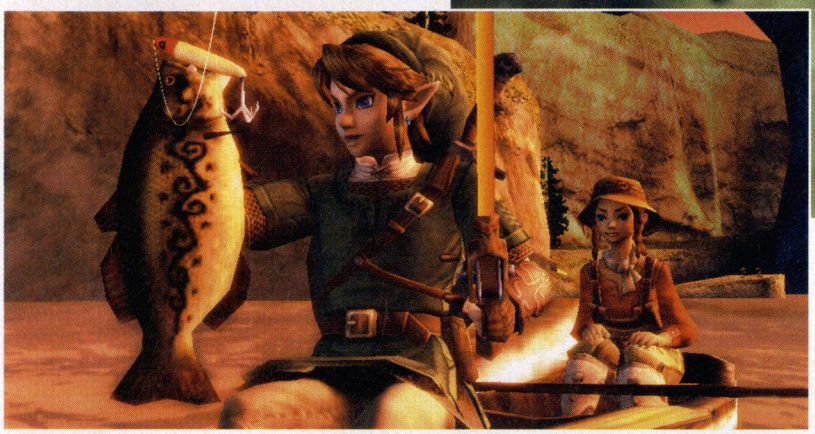
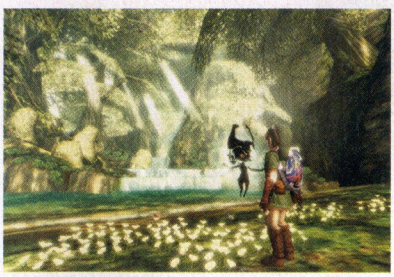
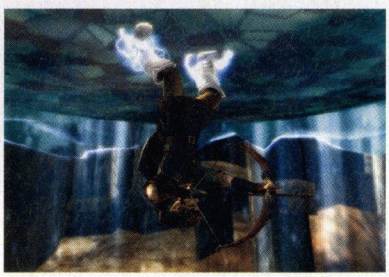
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

SYSTEM: **GCN/Wii**
DEVELOPER: **Nintendo EAD**
CATEGORY: **Action RPG**
PLAYERS: **1** • DUE: **December**

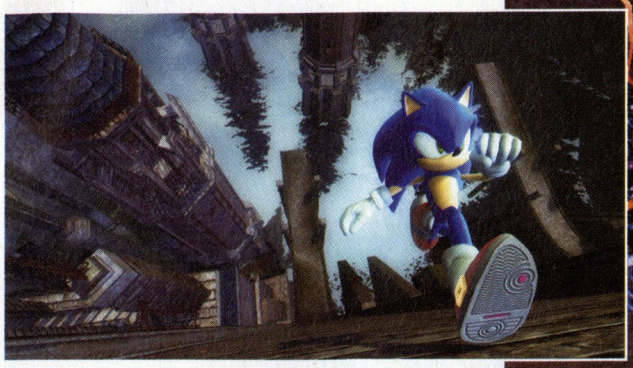


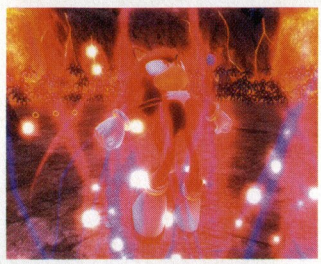




TUROK

SYSTEM: **PS3/Xbox 360**
DEVELOPER: **Propaganda Games**
CATEGORY: **Dinosaur killah**
PLAYERS: **1-Multi** • DUE: **2007**





SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

SYSTEM: **PS3/Xbox 360**
DEVELOPER: **Sonic Team**
CATEGORY: **Platformer** • PLAYERS: **1**
DUE: **Christmas 2006**

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

SYSTEM: **PC, PS2, Xbox 360**
DEVELOPER: **Konami**
CATEGORY: **Soccer sim**
PLAYERS: **1-8**
DUE: **November**

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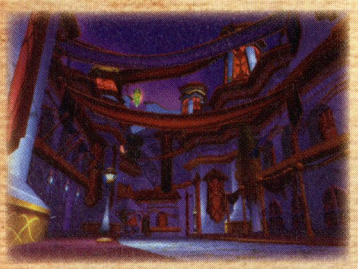
World of Warcraft THE BURNING CR

SYSTEM: **PC/MAC** ■ CATEGORY: **MMO (Expansion)** ■ PLAYERS: **LOTS** ■ DEVELOPER: **BLIZZARD** ■ DUE: **LATE 2006**

Nobody really expected World of Warcraft to be the runaway success it has been. The first massively multiplayer online RPG from developer Blizzard has quite literally taken the world by storm with going on seven million active subscribers. Some of this success can be put down to the fact that the game is based on the highly successful Warcraft series but this can't possibly cover all of it. In the end you can only really accept that, despite bitching on forums to the contrary, Blizzard really knows what they are doing when it comes to making a damn fine game. Now, two years after the release of the original game, Blizzard are on the verge of releasing their first expansion pack, The Burning Crusade, in which player will be able to raise their level to 70 (previously capped at 60), learn a new profession, Jewelcrafting, create characters from two new races, the Blood Elves and the Draenei and most importantly, travel to the Outlands.

"Lowering the raid cap makes each person's role more exciting"

With so many people playing World of Warcraft the announcement of an expansion pack is something you would think that would be met with enthusiasm but if the official World of Warcraft forums are anything to go by there are many players with questions they want answered before they will commit, due to the somewhat controversial decisions Blizzard has made concerning the content. Well, there's only one place to go for answers so we went right to the source, talking to **Shane Dabiri** (lead producer), **Jeff Kaplan** (lead game designer), and **Tom Chilton** (lead game designer), asking them the questions that everyone wants answered.



ZOMG! Teh tier 2 r teh useless in BC!!!

A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

The Burning Crusade is taking World of Warcraft in a rather new direction. Previously end game raids were 40 player, rather epic affairs in which guilds would field large, balanced groups of players to take down the toughest bosses in the game. Surprisingly, instead of carrying on in a similar vein, the expansion will feature maximum raid sizes of 25. While this may not seem like a big thing, many players seem to be worried that the lower level caps may make for easier end game content and a necessity to kick members of their guilds. To this end we asked Blizzard why exactly they made the choice to reduce the raid size to 25; "We wanted to make the raid game accessible to more people. Organizing and setting up 40-person raids was challenging for many guilds. Lowering the numbers will allow smaller guilds to participate while also allowing larger guilds with attendance problems to be able to coordinate the raids easier. In addition, lowering the raid cap makes each person's role in a raid that much more exciting. With 40-person raids, individual classes have a much narrower role; smaller raids will mean each person contributes much more. Overall it makes the game feel much better."

So how exactly do these smaller raid caps affect class balance? With the 40 man raids many guilds had worked their raid balance down to a fine point, knowing what or who is needed for any situation. Surely lowering the raid cap to 25 will make balancing the mix of characters more difficult. Apparently not according to Blizzard, "The 25-person raid cap will probably affect character balance far less than the introduction of the new spells, abilities, and talents. With these new additions, every class will gain the ability to do things they weren't previously able to do, which is guaranteed to have some effect on each player's contribution to a raid. In addition, character balance in a raid is often directly related to the encounter design itself. Certain encounters can bring out the best or worst of a class, and depending on that encounter's importance to the overall raid progression, it can

USADE

If this is to scale then Draenei are huge!

often create a balance disparity where it otherwise wouldn't have existed. At the end of the day, what matters is that players still enjoy playing their characters, whatever the environment."

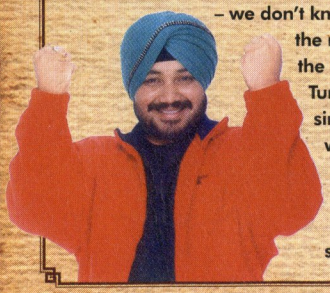
END GAME

These new encounters and environments are some of the things we are most excited about with the expansion. Having been out for two years the content of World of Warcraft has begun to get stale. Sure Blizzard have added numerous raids to the game but as far as smaller sized instanced content goes the last inclusion was Dire Maul released in WoW's first year. So how many new instances can we expect in The Burning Crusade? Blizzard doesn't look like they are going to disappoint, "We're hoping to ship with at least 8 dungeons for this expansion, some of which will comprise smaller wings. If you were counting total instance wings, the number would be around 20 or more. To put this in perspective, one of our expansion dungeons, Hellfire Citadel, has a level–60-62 wing, a level–61-63 wing, a level-70 wing, and a raid instance--in other words, 4 separate, distinct instances in one dungeon. As we proceed with testing, those numbers are likely to change prior to launch. We might add an instance to an area that we feel lacks enough compelling points of interest, or we might cut a dungeon or wing that we feel needs more development time."

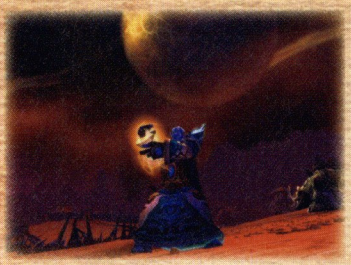
Even more exciting than new instances is the potential of the new encounters in these instances taking advantage of the new skills and abilities given characters between level 60 and 70. Although they weren't willing to give away too many details, Blizzard was good enough to say, "We've been pretty excited about designing the new raid content. For one thing, the new class spells and abilities are opening a number of new doors for us creatively. Just yesterday, we designed an encounter that placed a heavy focus on the mage's spell-steal ability. The new raid-cap size is allowing us to explore new options as well. It goes without saying that our developers are having a lot of fun testing the new content, and we're really looking forward to seeing players try it out themselves once the expansion ships." Although not said directly, their comment about an encounter hinging on

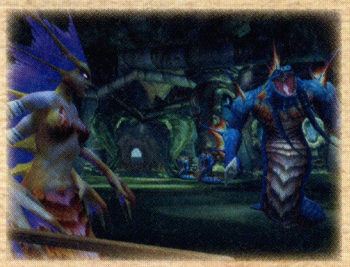
Tunak Tunak Tun

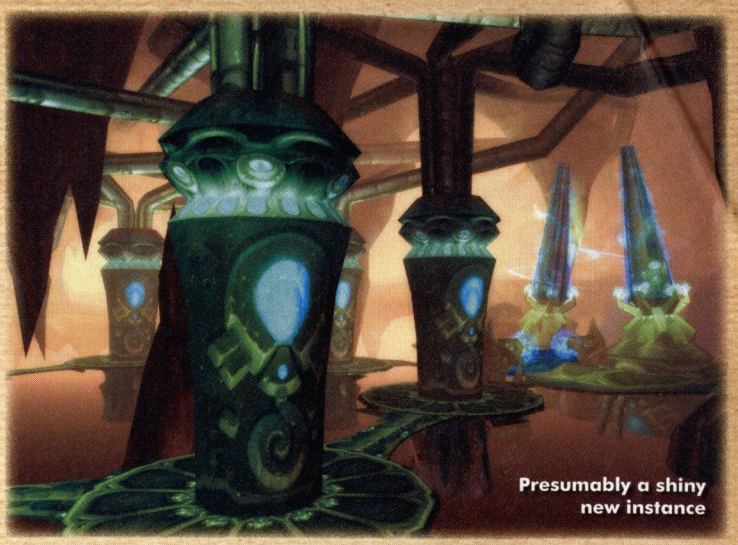
Although most of the videos have been pulled from online hosts such as Google Video or YouTube there have been a number of leaks from the closed Alpha of Burning Crusade showing the various emotes, combat animations and dance of the new races. The male Blood Elf dance emulates the burst of freeform awesomeness from the dance culmination of the hit quirky comedy Napoleon Dynamite while the female Blood Elf flounces out the moves from Brittany Spear's Toxic film clip. The female Draenei has a simple belly dance – we don't know if this is based off anything specifically at the moment (though rumours point to Shakira) and the Male Draenei performs the insanely cool/stupid Tunak Tunak Tun dance made famous by Punjabi singer Daler Mehndi. The Tunak Tunak Tun video was the first music video in India to utilise green screen technology and showcases Mehndi's enthusiastic if somewhat clumsy dancing. Needless to say the video has become something of an internet phenomenon.



At least the male Blood Elf dance isn't based around Kevin Federline







Presumably a shiny new instance

the Mage Spell-Steal ability hints to us that other encounters will be based around a similar class based necessity. Although this may make things a little tight for class balance it should go some way to easing the worries some players currently have about their class not being wanted come the expansion.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Of all the classes in World of Warcraft, perhaps the most contentious have always been the so called Hybrids, Shaman, Paladins and Druids, classes capable of fulfilling multiples roles. Or at least performing multiple roles in theory. In practice the raiding experience of the vast majority of hybrids has been healing, healing and a little more healing, leading to no end of frustration that the other aspects of their class have been, for want of a better term, ignored. Somewhat counter-intuitively, Blizzard stated that the smaller raid caps would make for a more varied hybrid experience. We asked them to elaborate; "With fewer players (and with the Horde and Alliance each gaining access to another class), the class composition of a raid will tend to average out a little less than in a larger raid, and hybrid classes will tend to have more opportunities to perform alternate roles. That is, it might be a more common case that when a raid needs an additional tank (for example), a paladin or druid in the raid might be called upon to perform that role." The fact that both Horde and Alliance will have access to the previously faction specific classes, the Shaman and Paladin should also aid in defining the role of the hybrid somewhat differently than before.

The talent previews seen so far seem to be aiming towards making the Shaman a DPS hybrid, essentially a healer who can pump out significant damage and the Paladin a tanking hybrid, capable of healing and retaining threat. What this means for Druids still remains to be seen. The fact that Shaman and Paladins will be available to both factions have caused some worries however, specifically amongst the Shaman community who fear that the introduction of Paladins will cause Shaman to be overlooked in raids due to the larger scale buffs the Paladins are capable of. By the sounds of it Shaman needn't be worried, as Blizzard states, "In most cases the buffs will stack. The only current case where we do not expect them to stack is with the paladin's Blessing of Salvation and shaman's Tranquil Air Totem."

Another place Hybrid have traditionally fallen down in World of Warcraft raids has been in terms of itemisation, with the majority of gear available to them in instances, especially the class specific gear, being dedicated almost solely to healing. We asked Blizzard if there was going to be any major changes with hybrid loot that may help them fulfill other roles within a raid aside from healing. Blizzards response, although brief, should give hybrid players more than a little hope, saying "Generally speaking, hybrid classes will have multiple sets (of differing style) to choose from when turning in their "token" for an armor set piece." Aside from being good

"Hybrid classes will have more opportunities to perform alternate roles"

HADOUKEN!

Mount Up

With the expansion there are interesting new developments with mounts in World of Warcraft. For a start, the Draenei race will be getting the Elekk as their racial mount, a kind of dwarf elephant thing, whereas Blood Elves will ride upon Cockatrices. Some people have expressed some doubts about the latter choice stating that they don't want to ride around on giant chickens with lizard parts. Knowing Blizzard, however, they will design the Blood Elf mount in the way they see fit in terms of art instead of relying on historical renditions of the mythological creature. More interestingly, players in the outlands will have access to flying mounts. Like normal mounts these will come in basic and epic versions. Unlike normal mounts, flying mounts will give players a real freedom of movement and an opportunity to bypass content. They will also be necessary to reach some of the new content that cannot be reached by foot.

Space Paladin Ho!

news for hybrids, Blizzard's answer gives away some of the clues as to how class specific itemisation will function in Burning Crusade. Instead of static random drops from boss encounters, which can result in uneven loot distribution, Burning Crusade will feature a token based system allowing any class to use the class specific or "Tier" drops from a boss. Hybrids aside, we also asked Blizzard if players can look forward to more Legendary items in Burning Crusade. The answer is a definite maybe, "We do hope to include some legendary items in The Burning Crusade. We have some really cool ideas, and we've learned a lot of valuable lessons from the legendaries that we've designed and implemented in World of Warcraft to date."

SOCKET TO 'EM

The other significant change with itemisation in The Burning Crusade comes in the form of the new crafting profession (only available to people who purchase the expansion), Jewelcrafting. Similar to the mechanic of "socketed" items that Blizzard introduced in Diablo II, Jewelcrafting gives players the ability to craft magical gems that can be socketed into either crafted or dropped gear that contains gem slots. From the details released so far we understand that players will be able to customise their socketable gear with gems but on a deeper level the abilities of the gems can be enhanced if placed in sockets that correspond to the colour of the gem. While the idea of customisable gear is definitely appealing we asked Blizzard how exactly the gear would compare to standard dropped gear, whether it would be comparable or worse due to the hybridised nature of the gear; "If a player uses gems of a quality roughly equivalent to the quality of the socketed item, we expect the item to have roughly the same point allocation (or slightly better) than a non-socketed item of the same level/quality. However, if in addition to this the gems the player selects match the color preference of the item, the item will end up being better than a non-socketed item of the same quality." Although the profession itself will only be available to players who buy the expansion, gems and Jewelcrafted items will be available to players of classic World of Warcraft, though naturally capped at level 60 gear.

CLASSIC LOVE

Now the release of The Burning Crusade may be a big event for players but, as sensible business practice dictates, it's only good news for those who are planning on buying the expansion. Only Burning Crusade players will be able to access the outlands. This is to be expected since the level of

Not a playable race

the area ranges between 60 and 70 but players of classic World of Warcraft won't even be able to enter the starting areas of the two new races, the Blood Elves homeland of Quel'Thalas and the Dreanei starting area of the Azuremyst Isles, even though they would be able to interact with Blood Elf and Draenei characters. We asked Blizzard how exactly this was possible; "As with Outland, the Blood Elf and Draenei starting areas will be separated by a portal that players who have the expansion will be able to travel through." OF course, Blizzard was also quick to point out it was not all bad news for classic World of Warcraft players going on to say, "Even though players without the expansion will not be able to travel to these new lands, they'll be able to gain some benefit from those who do. For example, players who find items in Outland will be selling/trading them to other players throughout the game, and non-expansion players will be able to use some of these items. The same will go for certain Jewelcrafter wares."

It's quite clear to us that Blizzard have definite plans on the direction that World of Warcraft is heading. They have created a monster of a game which only seems to get bigger by the day but even so they keep steering it in directions that players are not always initially comfortable with. That said, the success of World of Warcraft dictates that they must be doing something right. In fact, World of Warcraft currently accounts for 52.9% of the world MMO market share according to the website mmogchart.com. How can you continue develop a game to keep so many subscribers happy? According to Blizzard, "Having a large and diverse audience means that we need to provide a wide variety of content with the expansion. For example, we recognize that many players want more five-person instances, and we're delivering on that in The Burning Crusade. At the same time, we'll also be providing more of the things that people came to know and love from their early experiences with World of Warcraft--new zones to explore, new quests to undertake, a new profession to learn and profit by, and new levels of spells and abilities to master. Add to this the extensive refinements to the PvP and raid game, and we think there'll be something for everyone in this expansion." That's all well and good but surely there must be an inordinate amount of pressure put on the developers by the sheer success, not to mention weight of numbers as far as subscribers are concerned. Maybe so but Blizzard are more than willing to rise to the occasion, "At the end of the day, our commitment is to provide an experience that's as entertaining as it can be for our players while making design decisions for the overall good of the game, regardless of what our total population might be. We're pretty passionate when it comes to playing World of Warcraft--not to mention designing content for it--so this motivation comes as much from within as it does from what we read in the forums and on fan sites."

The release of The Burning Crusade is just around the corner – if everything is running on schedule that is; Blizzard are notorious for holding back product until they are happy with the quality, release schedule be damned – so does this spell the end of the World of Warcraft Saga? Not even close according to Blizzard, "We'd like to release new expansions for the game on a regular basis. There's still a lot of Warcraft content for us to explore, and we're looking forward to delivering some of this content to players in the years ahead." You read it here, more expansion coming on a regular basis. Of course we'll bring you more information on The Burning Crusade first. We should have a hands on report within the next few issues. <<

Pee Vee Pee

Player versus player content is undergoing a massive revision in the Burning Crusade expansion. For a start the Honour system will be getting a complete overhaul. Gaining ranks will no longer be a competitive thing in such that you are not ranked against other players but against a sliding scale. Instead of rank rewards being purchased from vendors for gold, players will be able to trade in their Honour (essentially a form of faction currency) for equipment. While this will be good for the majority of players there are a number of PVP fanatics who have fought their way to the highest ranks who are more than a little shocked that their Honour will effectively be set to zero when Burning Crusade launches. Another important feature will be Arena combat that will see 1v1 through 5v5 battles between organised teams of players. The arena battles may take place between teams from the same faction and will be rewarded on a different scale to normal PvP activities. Finally, at least one town in the Outlands will be a PvP objective allowing teams from either faction to take and hold the town, giving their side a temporary advantage in the area.

Rainbow Six
VEGAS
VEGAS

LAS, BABY VEGAS

»CAM SHEA

- SYSTEMS: **PC, PS3, PSP, X360**
- CATEGORY: **TACTICAL SHOOTER**
- PLAYERS: **1-16**
- DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL (PS3, XBOX 360), UBISOFT QUEBEC (PSP)**
- DUE: **NOVEMBER**

Vegas is a town built for five things –gambling, smoking, drinking, whoring and doing drugs. On my recent trip there I thankfully only did three of the above. I'll let you guess which three.

Vegas is the mecca of sin in America. This is a town where every vice is not only catered for, but actively embraced. Where the first sight upon clearing customs is row upon row of poker machines in the airport. Where you can smoke everywhere, drink everywhere, and where skimpily dressed plastic bodies are on display 24/7. Depending on who you talk to, it's either the ultimate party town or the ultimate altar to human greed. Or both.

It's the site of one of the most incredible money making machines there is, a place where a trail hand can spend a month's pay in three minutes, and where, like many American cities, the incredibly rich and incredibly poor live side by side, all the while with middle America whipping around them at all hours of the night and day. You simply have to see this city to believe how extravagant it is – in a night you can visit the canals of Venice, the Eiffel Tower, Manhattan, Egypt and ancient Rome, all without breaking a sweat.

It's lurid and it's over the top, but it's also depressing. In the cold (metaphorically that is – it *is* in the middle of the desert), sobering light of day Vegas can feel like a desolate place – grey, featureless and full of desperate people. To stay there for a few days is an adventure, to live there, one can only imagine, would be akin to hell.

THE SIX HITS THE FAN

Las Vegas also has another claim to fame. It's soon to become the location of the biggest terrorist attack in American history. Within a few short hours, this party capital is in disarray – several casinos are ablaze, countless civilians have been killed or taken hostage, and a rising tide of panic has flooded the city as tens of thousands of people try to get the hell out. In short, chaos reigns.

In the world of Rainbow Six: Vegas, you lead the small three man team that's sent in to try and take down the highly organised, heavily armed and strongly manned terrorist threat. It's a massive assignment that will take you from the glitziest casino floors to the dank underbelly of the city.

The scenario the 150 strong team working on the game at Ubisoft Montreal have constructed is at once ambitious, but also cleverly restricted. Unlike a game like Assassin's Creed, which is all about dynamic crowds helping to convey a living, breathing location, Rainbow team arrive after most of the crowds have bailed out. This is not a game where you're making your way through masses of panicking people, it's a game about what happens next; when Vegas has become a ghost of its former self, where it's – in essence – a showdown between two highly armed and highly trained teams in one of the greatest and most over the top playgrounds on Earth. It's a smart call, and the often desolate feeling environments only serve to underline how much Vegas depends on its crowds and its activity for its luster.

[above] We have a similar reaction to poker machines

SINGLE PLAYER HANDS ON

Our time with the single player game took us through an unfinished casino – the gothic themed Dante's. The chopper drops you off in an area still under construction – the vaulted arch roof is little more than a skeleton, palettes of bricks provide great cover, and there are numerous scaffolding rigs. From this entry point you can take a fast rope drop on one side or go down the stairs on the other, and once you do there are plenty of ways to move thanks to the numerous cover opportunities. Getting hit sees your vision become slightly jagged and hazy, and if this happens staying behind cover is paramount – another hit and you'll most likely be dead. Your team mates are just as fragile, and should one or both go down you have a short amount of time to get to them and revive them.

While this demo didn't go near the razzle dazzle that Vegas is known for, it does do a great job demonstrating the different environments you'll find yourself in and how that shifts up the tactics required. It's not long, for instance, before you find yourself descending into the bowels of the casino in pitch black conditions. Here you can switch between night vision and thermal vision, depending on what suits your purposes. Night vision in particular looks brilliant – you can see the honeycombed pattern of the display, which gives it a very hi-tech feel.

After this section you find yourself moving through a series of rooms, using snake cam on each door and experimenting with different entry strategies to clear them. The final section sees you assaulting a room with a number of terrorists and a hostage. Let the hostage die and you blow it. Succeed, and victory is short lived. Two doors are blown open and a stream of terrorists flood the room...

It wasn't a long demo, but by our second play through we had it down. Using cover is highly intuitive, and giving your squad orders as you quickly take down all the enemies in a room was certainly satisfying. We were able to test out a handful of weapons, all of which functioned well. There should be over 30 weapons in the final game, and realism is definitely a focus.

If we had to nit pick we'd say that there are elements of the visuals that need more polish. The facial animations for one weren't the best, especially since the actual models themselves are so good. Also, Vegas from the chopper at the beginning of the level looked good but wasn't super detailed.

Another small point is that the environment wasn't particularly interactive or destructive. Sure, there were the usual explosive barrels and doors that can shatter, but that was about it, which ultimately made the areas feel a little sterile. Thankfully, in other areas this improves somewhat. In the multiplayer demo poker machines get shot up nicely, and we've been told that in some areas certain cover objects you may shelter behind will be breakable. All in all it's shaping up well.

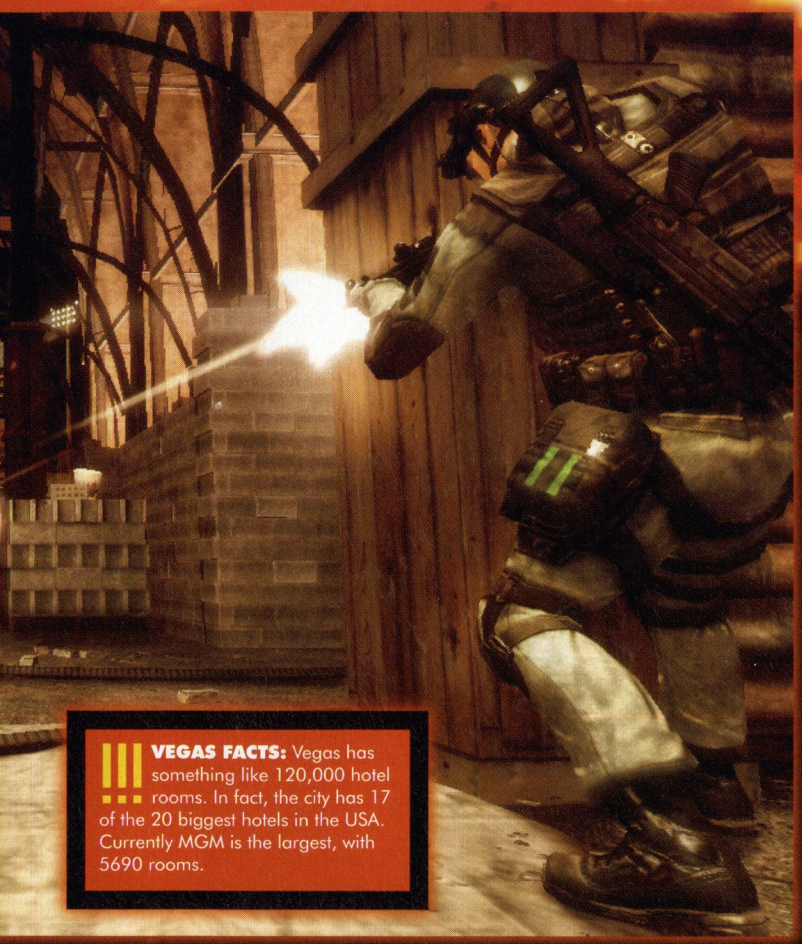
BACK TO THE PARTY

The gameplay is very much Rainbow taken to the next level. After the disappointing Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown, Vegas is once again back in the hands of the core team at Montreal that made Rainbow Six 3, and their goal once again is to craft tense firefights where the player has all the options he needs to intelligently take out all opposition. According to the team it's about "realism, tactics, close-quarters and tension", where if you make the wrong move you're dead.

You'll be taking on the role of Logan Keller, the team leader of Rainbow and recon expert. Under your command will be two squad mates –Mike Walter, who's your heavy weapons and demolition guru, and Jung Park, your long range and electronics boffin. Not only are you able to issue instructions with the press of a button, but they'll talk to you in real-time, suggesting courses of action you may not have considered. You'll also have other help, with info coming through to you from a number of other sources. Plus, Ding Chavez, the man with a name so heroic he was always destined for greatness, still plays a small role – he now heads up Rainbow as a whole.

There are a number of things that separates Rainbow Six: Vegas from the games that came before it, and one of the most important is its time frame. The entire game takes place over a night, and yes, the team were open about the acclaimed TV series 24 being a source of inspiration and reference. The upshot of the structure is that the action is kept tight and the tension high – you'll be moving seamlessly through a variety of locations in Vegas, following the narrative and its twists

Cover me – I'm going to place a bet!



VEGAS FACTS: Vegas has something like 120,000 hotel rooms. In fact, the city has 17 of the 20 biggest hotels in the USA. Currently MGM is the largest, with 5690 rooms.

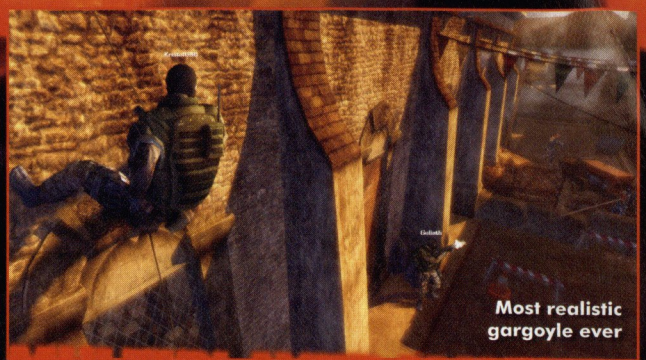
as information is uncovered. One of the biggest goals for the game is to make you feel like the chaos that is a highly organised and coordinated terrorist strike on Vegas only escalates as the game progresses.

Hand in hand with this is that Montreal have ditched briefing rooms and cutscenes. All story and plot information will be told in-game as the action unfolds. You'll get regular news updates and objective updates through dialogue and picture in picture pop up windows, and important scripted sequences will drive the narrative along. You'll even hear the terrorists talking to each other. It should make for a game that doesn't lose momentum.

CREATE A KILLER

The player creation tool (or Persistent Elite Creation 2.0 to be pedantic) is quite accomplished, allowing you to go to town creating a truly unique character to take online. Every aspect is malleable, from facial hair, scars, face paint, masks, goggles and helmets, through to body armour for every conceivable place and whether it should have camo (and what type).

Perhaps the coolest element uses the new Xbox camera. Simply adjust the light levels, then take a photo of the front and side of your face and the software will take care of the rest, mapping your face onto your character model. It's seamless and cool... although we think there may still be a few bugs to work out: all the demonstrations we saw left everyone looking bald. Still, it's a nice inclusion.



Most realistic gargoyle ever

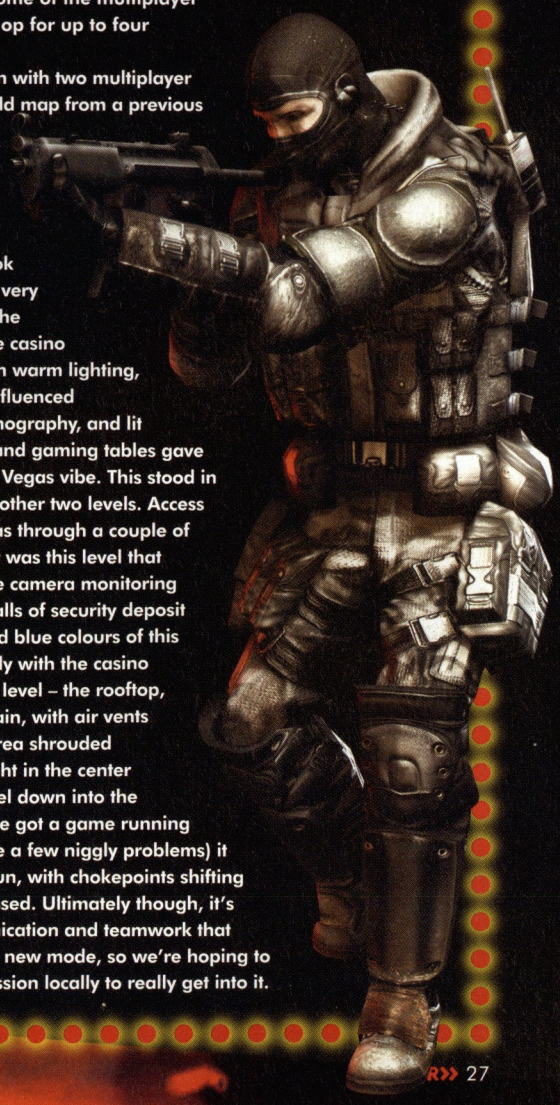
MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM

Multiplayer for Vegas is shaping up well. There are six adversarial game modes (including classic Raven Shield modes and maps) for play over splitscreen (you can even play splitscreen online), system link and Xbox Live. Up to 16 players can join in, and the same emphasis on team work applies for online games.

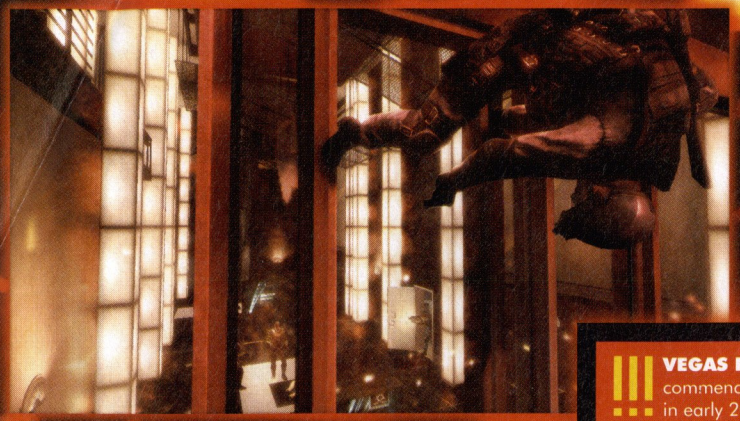
The game modes are Retrieval (Rainbow's version of CTF), Survival, Team Survival, Sharpshooter, Team Sharpshooter and the new mode, Attack and Defend. As the name implies, in this game one team assaults and the other defends. Every map for this mode is custom made for it, with mission-based objectives, whether it's defusing a bomb, rescuing hostages, retrieving a briefcase etc. Settings within games are adjustable, so if you don't like a weapon or gadget you can lose it when creating setting up.

There'll of course be a ranking system for players, and at each rank you'll unlock new equipment. To keep things balanced and more of a challenge, multiplayer games will utilise a match making system, pitting you against players of a similar rank based on the leaderboard and overall play time.

As expected, you'll also be able to play through the entire single player game (and some of the multiplayer maps as well) in co-op for up to four players. Sweet.



We went hands on with two multiplayer maps; one was an old map from a previous Rainbow title, while the other was brand new and very cool. Set in the Mayan themed casino, it took place across several very different levels. On the ground floor was the casino – richly coloured with warm lighting, interesting Mayan influenced architecture and iconography, and lit up Poker machines and gaming tables gave it a typically opulent Vegas vibe. This stood in stark contrast to the other two levels. Access to the lower floor was through a couple of breach points, and it was this level that housed the vault, the camera monitoring control room and walls of security deposit boxes. The stark, cold blue colours of this area contrasted nicely with the casino level above. The top level – the rooftop, was different yet again, with air vents running across an area shrouded in darkness. A skylight in the center allowed you to rappel down into the casino area. Once we got a game running smoothly (there were a few niggly problems) it proved to be great fun, with chokepoints shifting as the game progressed. Ultimately though, it's going to be communication and teamwork that makes or breaks the new mode, so we're hoping to organise another session locally to really get into it.



VEGAS FACTS: Work commenced on the game in early 2004. There are now 150 people working on the game, and over the course of development seven children have been born by team members.

Where would terrorists be without construction sites?

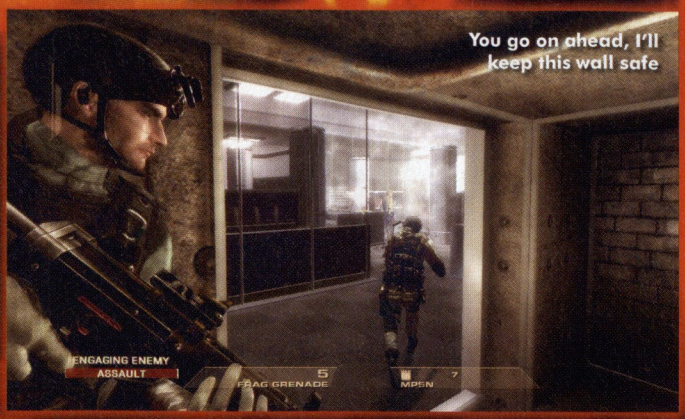
30 SECONDS OF GAMEPLAY

Remember when Bungie said that Halo was really just 30 seconds of fun over and over again? Well, when you boil it down the goal for Montreal with Rainbow Six Vegas isn't that different. The team call the loop O.P.A. – Observe, Plan and Assault, and say that this is the only way you're going to survive in the game. Run and gun simply isn't an option. Each confrontation is best approached by surveying your surroundings, formulating a plan of action for your team, then executing it. Fortunately you have a number of mechanics and gadgets that help make this 30 seconds as fun as possible.

To help with situational awareness for example, you hold in the left trigger to press up against any wall or object in the game. This switches the perspective from first to third person, and from this viewpoint you can check out the surroundings from cover, then pop out to fire, or just blaze away using blind fire – a far less accurate option, but one that may help provide some covering fire for your team mates. Taking the time to check out your environment will also reveal a number of routes you can take in most areas. Sure, there are always plenty of objects and walls to take cover behind, but it goes further than this. Most rooms, for instance, have at least a couple of entry points. Using the ever-handy snake cam, you can find out how many guys are in the next room, line your squad mates up against one door, give them their command (open, frag and clear/open, smoke and clear etc), then go in through the other door yourself. Or you could just shoot out the window, throw in a smoke grenade, switch to thermal vision then go through.

There are also numerous points which you can use to rappel down the outside of buildings, so you might send your team mates down one rappel point while you take another. If you want to be especially sly, you can rappel inverted, allowing you to just pop your head into the space below and take out a few terrorists. Whatever way you approach it, there's nothing quite like abseiling down the outside of a building then swinging in, shattering the glass and plugging some bad guys.

One of the handiest new abilities for smoothly executing a plan is tagging enemies, and you can tag two at a time. Say you're crouched down outside a room. There are three terrorists inside and they have a hostage. You can tag the two other guys by simply moving



your sight over them and hitting the back button. Then, when you execute the order all you have to worry about is taking out the guy with the hostage, safe in the knowledge that your team mates will eliminate the two other threats. It's a great system that lets you approach firefights tactically.

While you're playing you're also dynamically switching your AI squad's rules of engagement. There are two settings – Infiltration (only fire if fired upon) and Assault (go nuts), which, again gives you greater control over your squad.

While the enemies in the demo that we played through weren't at all hard to take down, enemy AI will ramp up as you progress, to the point where you'll be pitted against enemies that are essentially as resourceful as you are – like a mirror of the Rainbow team. Even at their basic level, the terrorists will take advantage of the environments, trying to flank around you and take you by surprise. They'll also take advantage of technology. Sure, you may have night vision and thermal vision, but the terrorists have alternate vision modes too.

THE MAYAN TEMPLE

While you'll be able to see many of the signature Vegas casinos in the helicopter fly bys, you won't actually be assaulting any of them – for obvious reasons. All the interior locations you'll see will be Ubisoft Montreal creations, and they've gone to town on the designs to fit the Vegas style. A few we saw were a gothic casino, an Oriental themed casino and a Mayan casino. They're quite stunning, and have obviously allowed Montreal's designers to really show off what the next gen machines are capable of. The oriental themed one in particular looks stunning, with a rich red colour scheme and rows of warrior statues on either side of the main area.

Of course, Vegas is more than just casino floors, and you'll be getting a window into every side of the city, from the blazing lights of Fremont St (where all the original casinos were built) and The Strip, through to underground tunnels, bars, kitchen areas and of course, the fortresses that are casino vaults.

One thing's for sure, this is going to be a side of Vegas you've never see before, and it looks like Ubisoft Montreal are on track to deliver one hell of a ride.

THE PSP VERSION

Yes, Rainbow Six: Vegas is coming to PSP, but no, it's not the same game. It's an all new shooter that uses many of the same mechanics and is set over the same time period. Developed by the brand new Ubisoft Quebec studio, and also due in November, you play as an anti-terrorist duo in this one, switching dynamically between your assault specialist Brian Armstrong and your sniper Shawn Rivers. Anther interesting feature is how tagging works. As opposed to the tagging system in console Vegas, which allows you to mark men for your team mates to shoot, in this game you can tag people so that they show up on your map, allowing you to see their movements. Thus, you can snake cam in under a door and tag everyone you can see in the room, so that before you burst in, you'll have a better idea of where they are. You're also able to use cover (which switches the view to third person), and will have an arsenal of 15 weapons and over 10 gadgets for use in the game.

The PSP game has six unique locations in the single player game including a ranch near Las Vegas, a private airport, a water filtration plant and a dam. Not exactly what you'd expect from a game set in Vegas, but hey, what ya gonna do?

To be honest, this game is looking pretty rough around the edges at this stage, and visually is more reminiscent of a PSone game than a PS2 title. It doesn't help that many of the environments seem to be small areas and corridors. Still, it does support online multiplayer for up to six players as well as ad hoc multiplayer so that could be cool for online starved PSP owners.

INTERVIEW

We spoke to **Jean-Francois Poirier**, the Associate Producer on Rainbow Six: Vegas. Here are some of his most interesting comments...

On the series '24' being a source of inspiration...

"We use it as a reference. Things that we found that were truly amazing in this series is the urgency and the tension. The fact that the action happens in a short period of time - it's 24 hours, there's constantly action. There's up and down but the down brings more tension. The whole flow of this series was very appealing to us. And of course when we created Rainbow Six: Vegas one of our objectives was to break the mold of the previous games. So no more menus – we want to tell the story differently, so by having the game in a shorter period of time we needed to keep tension etcetera, so that was a great source of inspiration for sure."

On blowing up Vegas...

"We're trying to be as faithful to the city as possible in terms of recreating casinos and landmarks, but we're using our own creations for the player to play in. We're not using the real names and we're not giving damage to those casinos. All the chaos and the explosions will come from either casinos we've built for the fly by or locations that we've built that the player will be in."

On how much modification they've done to the Unreal Engine 3...

"A lot! For one thing the AI we've needed to build from the ground up. It's not easy because we have the Rainbow AIs, we have the terrorist AI, we have hostage AI. Ultimately, that part is so important for the consumer because at the end of the day he's going to be giving orders to his team, he's going to be fighting terrorists, and he doesn't want to shoot pixels. You want to shoot terrorists that move around, that try to surprise you. If you get killed because you think you played well but that guy made a smart move, that's great satisfaction you know? So a lot of efforts were put on the AI.

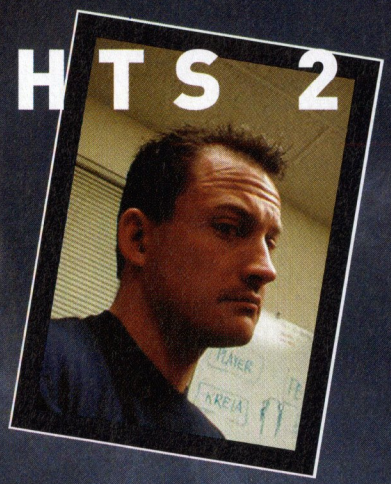
"Of course, we're doing mo-cap for our animation, and all the animation systems with Unreal had to be put in place. Same for sound. We're using an in-house sound engine, so to we had to incorporate that in the engine again. And to build all the multiplayer features for our multiplayer maps, and our character customisation system. So a lot of stuff had to be built. It's not just 'ooh, okay we're using this and we're making a game' – there's a lot of modification to make the game what it is ultimately."

On PS3 development...

"We're doing a straight port of the Xbox 360 version to PS3, so we have a great team of programmers right now working on porting the game, trying to get the exact same experience on 360 and on PS3."

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

SYSTEM: **PC** ■ CATEGORY: **RPG** ■ PLAYERS: **1-64** ■ DEVELOPER: **OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT** ■ DUE: **OCT/NOV**



Chris Avellone is one of the most important designers in the Western RPG scene. One of the co-founders of Obsidian Entertainment – developers of the critical hit Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords, he has a background in game design that reads like a checklist of the greatest PC RPGs. Planescape: Torment? Check. Fallout 2? Check. Icewind Dale? Check. Next up from Obsidian is the highly anticipated Neverwinter Nights 2. To find out more about the game and Avellone's approach to RPG game design in general, Daniel Staines caught up with the man himself.

HYPER: When you begin designing a game like NWN 2, do you start by considering the limitations of the technology and design around that or set design goals and attempt to build technology that supports them?

Chris Avellone: We usually let the design goals drive the technology, and that's been the case in NWN2. For example, we knew we wanted to improve the toolset, so we looked at all the design suggestions and requests from the community over the years to see what tech changes we needed to do to incorporate them.

Also, we knew we wanted to create an epic, cinematic storyline, so we tried to break down those elements and see what scripting and tech challenges those presented - prop switching, cinematic dialogue with modifiable cameras, global scripts, ability to lead large numbers of troops, and so on.

In your estimation, which elements of the original NWN were the most successful and the least successful? How have you improved upon or rectified these elements in the sequel?

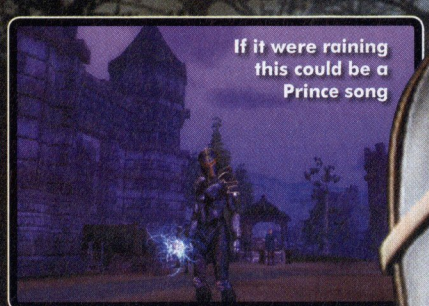
We think NWN1 was extremely well done, so we took a step back and just tried to decide what we can improve, not change - this meant we focused on the toolset, improving the scope and feel of the single-player/multi-player campaign, and giving the game a visual facelift.

The toolset in particular was a huge success and one of the signature elements that made the first game what it was. So we've just tried to include even more flexibility in building modules and allow people to build and script modules faster and more efficiently.

We took a long look at the series of fan-created modules over the years, and we saw a lot of modules that make extremely creative use of the toolset to pull off adventures, encounters, and locales that the creators probably never thought could be pulled off - extraplanar travel, dream sequences, and incredible combos of props to complement these experiences. So what we wanted to do with NWN2 was increase the options of what you could do and for every new feature we added, we tried to ensure there was a lot of flexibility in how you wanted to modify it.

For example, you can do new interface art, mix props across different tile sets, copy and save groups of props, build your own items from a variety of pieces, scale buildings and creatures (as well as tint and color them), so if you want a micro-iron golem as a henchman, you can - or if you want a three story blue iron golem as an end boss for your level, we have that, too. Even water has a whole series of parameters you can adjust, including the choppiness, flow, viscosity, and the color... these parameters together can allow you to make acid pools, slime pools, and even rivers of lava that can run through your levels.

Even though it ended up creating a LOT of options for players (which can be daunting), we decided to err on the flexibility range of the spectrum, since we hope that people will be using the toolset for years to come, and the more options we provide now, the less they need to ask for down the road.



If it were raining this could be a Prince song

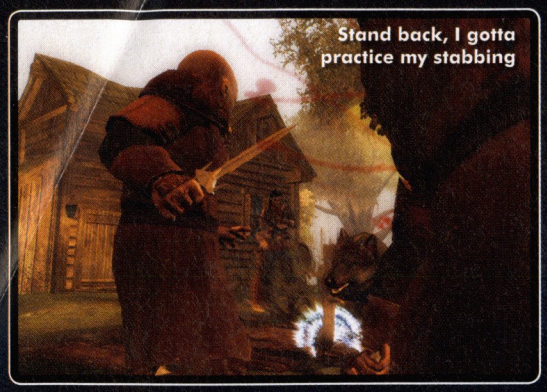
In terms of narrative, in what ways – if any – is NWN 2 linked to NWN?

NWN2 takes place 5 years after the last expansion, and while the story stands by itself, players who played Neverwinter Nights 1 should see references to familiar events and see characters they met in previous games and the expansions.

One of the hallmarks of your approach to RPG design is a focus on NPCs as a means for the player to express themselves – such as in KOTOR 2's influence system, for example. Is this a trend you've continued in NWN 2?

Yes, we've tried to refine and improve the influence system for NWN2 (although it does have different affects in NWN2 since the genre conventions are different without the Force guiding your destiny) - you should find that your companions look to you as an example for how to act, and they even view your treatment of them and other people you meet in the game, and the player can gain or lose influence with them accordingly. It's a delicate balancing act in some instances, for sometimes showing favor or winning the respect of one companion may have negative repercussions for another... especially for romances or rivalries.

Note that these aren't simply "hey, if you're acting good, X guys will like you," and "if you're acting evil, Y guys will like you." The decisions you make that can affect



influence aren't necessarily tied to influence decisions, but can be more abstract and not related to alignment at all - they can even be something as philosophical as approaches to the applications of magic, historical examinations and judgments, tactics, and even the role of creative inspiration in one's life.

More generally speaking, what means have you provided for players to express themselves in NWN 2? In what key ways will individual experiences of the game differ?

I think playing the game good or evil for starters will have an impact, as will character and race choice, and what influence you show to your companions and when should cause new options and twists in the storyline as things progress. We also have used all the design elements we've done for the previous host of RPGs we've done at Black Isle Studios and Obsidian and tried to apply as many of the design elements from there into the game as well.

How do you balance the desire to let players express themselves with the desire to tell a compelling narrative?

Lots of dialogue options and quest solutions. We couldn't create a huge open world where you could do anything, but we did try to provide flexibility within the narrative for how the player reaches each objective. We think players will be pretty amazed at the scope of Neverwinter City - and the sheer scope of the threat in Act 3.

How important is alignment in NWN 2? What effect will it have on the player-character and the gameworld at large?

It has some impact at significant moments in the game, notably Neverwinter City and the end game, but the player will not feel alignment repercussions throughout the game. It does impact game mechanics, however, and it can affect what classes you can remain a part of and level into.

Party NPCs in the original NWN were more akin to tools than people. They were something the player could use to do stuff such as picking locks, casting spells and so on. This seems to be the opposite of your usual approach, which tends to focus on the personalities of party NPCs rather than their abilities. The question is: on which end of this spectrum does NWN 2 sit?

NWN2 is a good balance of both companion personality management and companion tactical management - the influence description above is what plays a large role. In general, you can't just see your companions as tools, because it would be like having a toolbox where some of the tools don't like each other very much, some need to be kept in plain view to keep them out of trouble, and others may even leave you if you let rust gather on them or misuse them.

A full-sized RPG is always going to require a big investment from the player in terms of actually getting into the game and then sticking with it till the end. What have you done in NWN 2 to get players interested and then keep them playing once the "honeymoon phase" is over?

The player levels, not just with numbers, but prestige and responsibility as well. By this, we mean we've presented the players with several advancement schemes beyond simple level and stat gains - we have influence, stronghold improvement, prestige class evolution, and even learning how to upgrade, train, and recruit soldiers, blacksmiths, farmers, and so on.

We also try to break up the visuals and the challenges pretty frequently so the player isn't always going through the same motions in each new area - we have diplomatic challenges, then dungeon crawls, then stealth missions, and we try to keep them all juggled so the play experience doesn't stagnate as the player progresses.

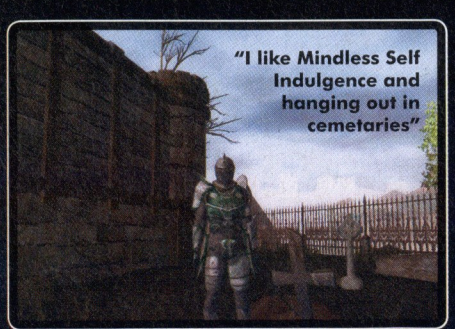
Tell us about the villain(s) in NWN 2. Who's the big bad and what reasons will the player have for wanting to ram a sword down their throat?

There's one bad guy? :) We decided to up the ante on this one - the player's got a number of main bad guys on different fronts, depending on the Act, and they all present the player with different challenges - political,

The New Project

You've said on a number of occasions that a new project is in the works at Obsidian – can you share any information on that?

Not yet, but keep watching the skies. Sega's been very good to us, and we think people will be happy when the product's finally revealed.



That's some nasty garlic breath

Remember Me?

You're known for your memorable characters. Of all the characters you've created thus far, which is your favourite?

Morte, Fall-From-Grace, and Ravel from Planescape: Torment are my all-time favourites. I had some ones I loved for Fallout 3, but alas.

resource, and combat-wise. Even more complicated, the enemies don't like each other very much, resulting in a series of complicated cross-battles as well... but you'll have to play the game to find out.

Like its predecessor, NWN 2 is clearly going to have a strong focus on community-created content. However, as the Hot Coffee and Oblivion "topless mod" scandals demonstrate, modding communities can sometimes create content that negatively impacts on a game's public image. Is this something that concerns you with NWN 2? Have you taken any steps to prevent this sort of thing from occurring?

Well, none of the models in the game are set up to be offensive (they've all cleared Hasbro, Wizards, and Atari), and what people make with the toolset (including mods and hakpacks) is solely their business - we just want to provide a toolbox for them to make adventures.

Are there any plans to release NWN 2 expansions a la Shadows of Undrentide or Hordes of the Underdark? How about premium modules such as Kingmaker?

Can't say for both, unfortunately. My personal desire is to do both, but there are logistical issues that need to be ironed out first and we want to make sure we get the main game polished and done first.

In the past, you've called Obsidian an "RPG game company". Does this mean that we'll never see you guys do a title that isn't an RPG? Is there any desire within the company to do a different genre?

I think RPG mechanics are slowly creeping their way into a wide variety of game genres nowadays, so it's not hard to be an RPG company, yet still take those RPG elements to other genres, for example, a System Shock style game, or even an action RPG like we did with Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance back at Black Isle Studios.

In a lot of RPGs, the mechanics of character development (such as assigning XP) are usually abstracted from the narrative and lack contextual justification in this regard. You partly addressed this issue in KOTOR 2 by contextualising the levelling-system with a narrative explanation for it – i.e. the Exile's unique connection to the Force. Is this something you set out to do from the get go? Do you feel that abstract stat-juggling diminishes the impact of the gameworld you're trying to create? Could it be done away with altogether?

K2 - we thought it would be neat to be able to affect the Dark Side and Light Side of the companions, and it seemed like a natural transition from K1.

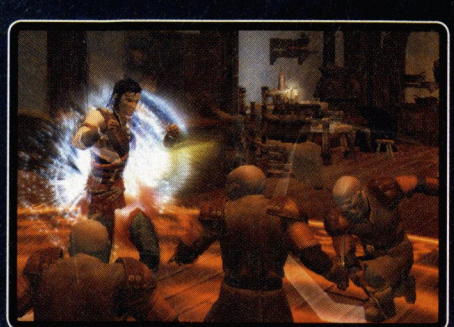
Stat-juggling does have the danger of abstracting from the narrative experience. When possible, I would rather these things be presented in non-numerical terms (facial changes if going to the Dark Side, limping if wounded, color bars instead of number bars), but this isn't always possible, and in a game like D&D, there are many fans that want to see the hard numbers. Could it be done away with altogether? I think it could, but probably not in a D&D game that the hardcore number-crunchers can enjoy, and NWN2 has a large number of fans like that.

Speaking of KOTOR 2, what happened with the ending? Why were so many important conversations – many of which can be found in the game's archives – cut from the final product?

Ran out of time. This isn't LucasArts' fault, it's mine. I should have bit the bullet and cut a planet from the game, but I was afraid if we had less content than K1, it would be negatively perceived. I am still glad that people were able to see the end conversations, though, and I wish they could have been included in the final game.

And now for the obligatory Torment question: Despite widespread acclaim, Planescape: Torment was not a financial success. Why not? Can a relatively "hardcore" game like PS:T ever be a financial success – even as making games becomes more expensive and time consuming than ever?

It made a profit, but it didn't result in an avalanche of cash, no. It was, however, soothing to my designer soul. As far as the reasons why, I don't think the box cover helped, it wasn't a familiar setting, and there was an awful lot of reading in it. I personally loved working on it, but I don't know if anyone felt tempted to buy it vs. say, a Baldur's Gate, which is easier to get your head around, and is more comfortable to fantasy players. I think Planescape would have sold a lot more copies if they'd just followed the BG marketing design box cover and replaced the Bhaal logo with a Lady of Pain one, and I think you would have gotten a jump in sales right there. Still, I think the very nature of the setting doesn't cater to the mainstream, so the marketing angle only goes so far.



In any event, back to Neverwinter Nights 2 - we're looking forward to releasing it in October, and we're even more eager to see what the mod community will come up with so we can play some D&D adventures they've created. <<

Canis Canem Edit

SYSTEM: **PS2** ■ CATEGORY: **ACTION** ■ PLAYERS: **1** ■ DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER** ■ DUE: **LATE 2006**

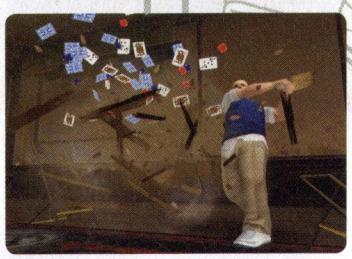
As you would have heard by now, the European (and Australian) title of the upcoming Rockstar game Bully has been changed to the slightly less identifiable and infinitely clumsier Canis Canem Edit, or Dog Eat Dog, the school motto of Bullworth Academy in which the game is set. Although we find the new name to be a little unwieldy both in terms of immediacy and recognition, it does have the a rather amusing bonus; if you put Canis Canem Edit through most of the online Latin translators, chances are you will end up with something along the lines of "Dog publishes a book (about dogs)". Lampooning and name changes aside, Canis Canem Edit is shaping up to be quite an interesting and remarkably fun game.

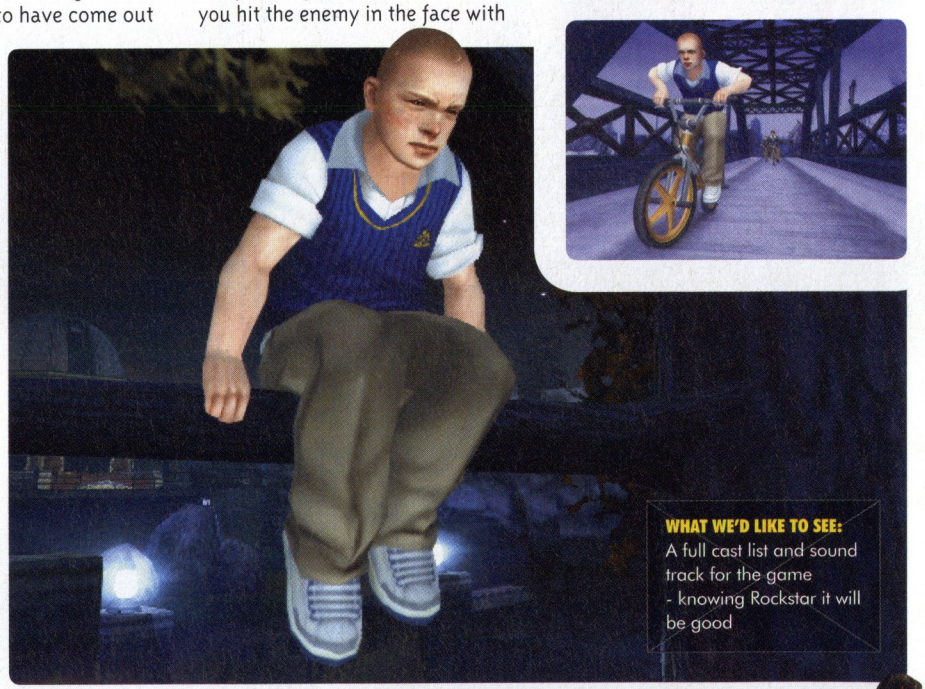
Imagine living inside of Grange Hill, Degrassi Junior High, The Breakfast Club, The Outsiders or really anything that has been set in a school in the last half a century and you'll have a good idea of what Bullworth Academy is like. It's a boarding school for homeless archetypes; nerds, jocks, bullies, preppies and greasers all fight for their place in the pecking order. Enter Jimmy Hopkins, a troubled but generally well meaning 15 year old dumped on the steps of the Academy when his mother and the latest in a long line of unwanted, uncaring (not to mention probably rich) stepfathers go on a year long honeymoon. He's literally dumped into his new environment and left to fend for himself.

DOG EAT CONTROVERSY

The most we've heard so far about Canis Canem Edit was condemnation due to the name. Based on the title alone Bully has been decried for advocating teen violence, bullying in schools and every other manner of evil under the sun. This couldn't be further from the truth. If anything, Canis Canem Edit is shaping up to be one of the cleverest, nostalgic and thoughtful games to have come out in recent years. Sure, Jimmy may get into his fair share of fights but what kid has never raised a fist in anger or defence? The combat in Canis Canem Edit is both innocent and rather clever. Similar to the fighting engine in The Warriors, Jimmy can lock on to a target, showing a health ring around the target's feet. Simple combos, blocks and grapples are the only moves Jimmy has access to initially, but throughout the game he has opportunities to learn more, either by working out in gym class or training with the local hobo who also happens to be a fighting master.

Instead of finishing moves, when Jimmy weakens his opponent to s significant extent he can unleash a humiliation move, such as the classic "stop hitting yourself" move where you hit the enemy in the face with

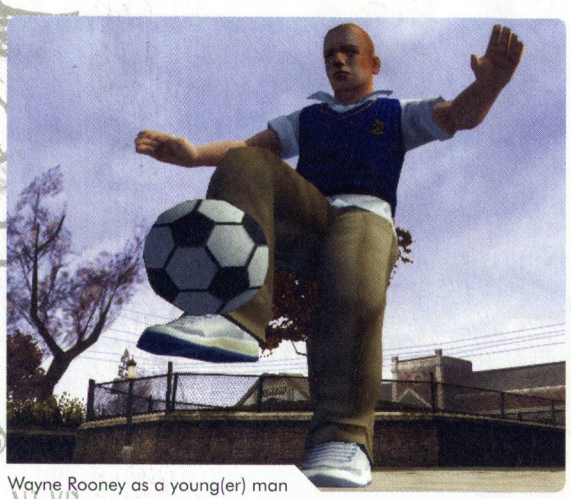




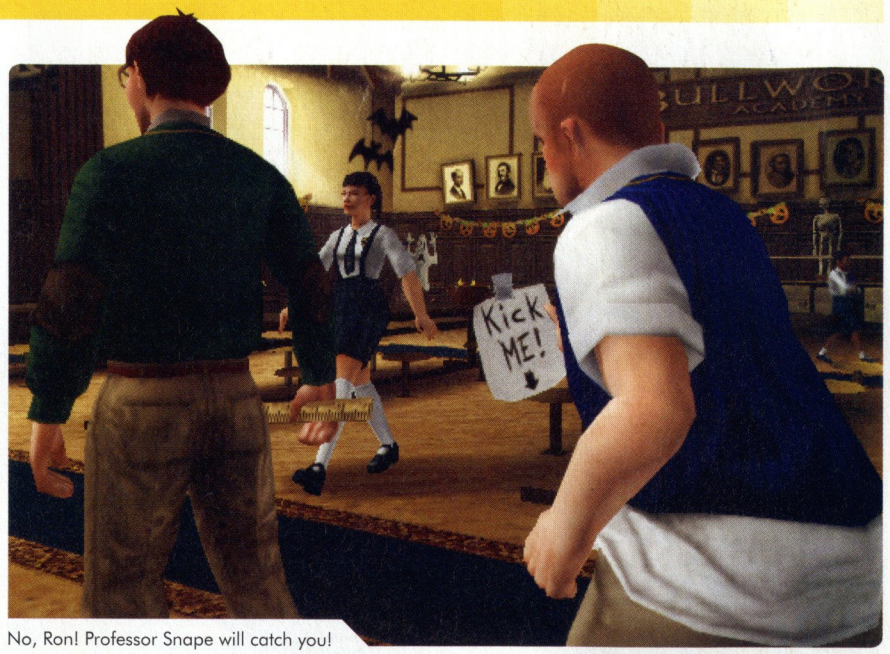
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
A full cast list and sound track for the game - knowing Rockstar it will be good

You don't need to steal from the library Jimmy

The horrors of school cafeteria food: THE GAME!



Wayne Rooney as a young(er) man



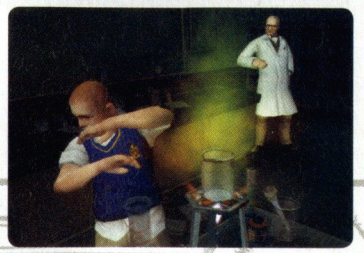
No, Ron! Professor Snape will catch you!

their own fists, a wedgie, noogie, ear twist and the like. These moves finish combat instantly and look pretty damn funny to boot. Jimmy is also capable of using weapons during the fights such as baseball bats, cricket bats, garbage bin lids and slingshots but no matter what is used there is no blood and nobody dies. In keeping with the childish nature of the fighting, Jimmy is also a typical, seemingly unstoppable teenage boy. Amusingly, Jimmy can sprint forever but will fall asleep on his feet if he's out past 2am.

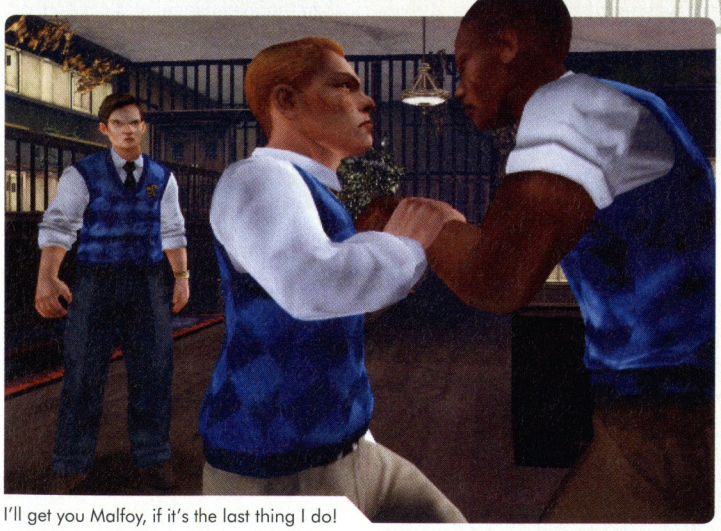
THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

It is the context of Jimmy's actions that makes the game so clever. Although something of a deliberate outsider, preferring to stand on his own two feet and make snide remarks rather than integrate fully into the school environment, Jimmy is something of a defender of the weak, standing up for those who can't do it themselves. The early missions we have seen show Jimmy standing up for the nerds, not because he particularly likes them but because somebody has to. The first chapter even culminates with a boss battle that ends not with some spectacular killing move or splash of blood but with Jimmy giving the leader of the bullies a lecture not to be so mean to people.

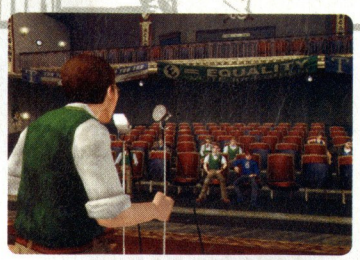
This kind of do right attitude runs throughout what we have seen in the game. Even though it is possible to be a jerk and beat up students, pick on the weak and generally live down to all the expectations of the naysayers but for every action there is a consequence. Break school rules, steal, bully or generally get too far out of line and the player will get in trouble if a prefect or teacher sees them. Act up too much and you'll be punished with a dull menial chore such as mowing the lawn or cleaning blackboards that is really not particularly fun to play but must be completed if you want to continue the game. If you think you can avoid this by simply not acting up in front of teachers or prefects think again. The other students, each with their own individual model and AI may go and tell on you. Of course there are ways to get around being punished – you can stomp on a prefect's toes and hopefully run far enough away to hide in a garbage bin and wait until the heat lowers but chances

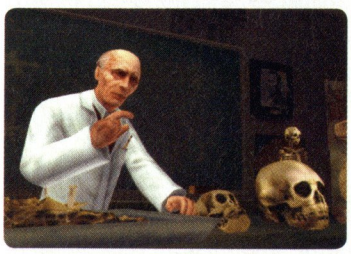


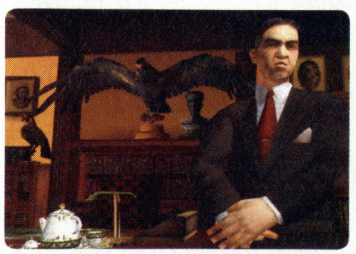
Canis Canem Edit is shaping up to be one of the cleverest, nostalgic and thoughtful games in recent years



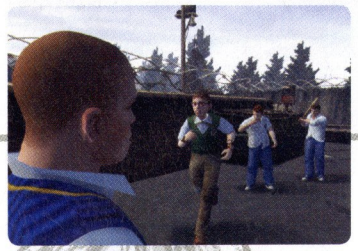
I'll get you Malfoy, if it's the last thing I do!

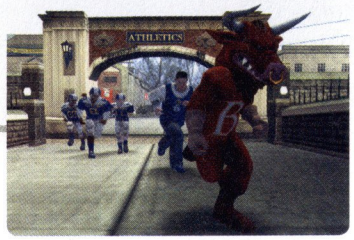


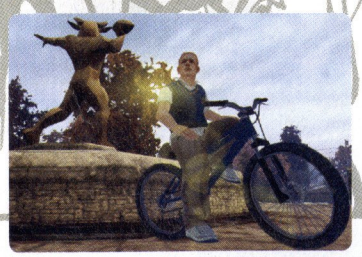




Nice sweater vest - did your mum knit that?



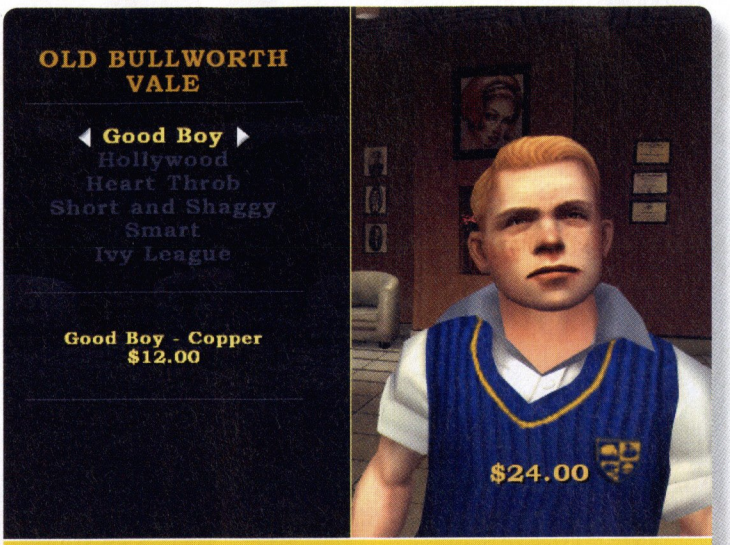




are you will eventually be caught and punished.

Being a school, Jimmy also has to go to class. Skip class and similar punishments to bullying can occur, not that you'd necessarily want to as classes are brief and fun mini games that provide benefits in the rest of the game if you beat them. Chemistry, for example, is a basic rhythm game in which Jimmy must match buttons to the symbols going through the flame of his Bunsen Burner. Achieve a satisfactory score and Jimmy will learn how to make a new scientific weapon such as stink bombs or firecrackers on the chemistry set in his room. English charges Jimmy with finding hidden words in a letter jumble; pass and your social interaction skills will improve. Improve your art skills and you better your chances with the ladies – if you manage to score a kiss your health improves!

By the look on his face, Jimmy is handing the flowers to the wrong student



Go to your room!

Jimmys room serves as a kind of nexus in the game. Every night Jimmy must go there to sleep lest he be fatigued the next day but the importance of the room goes much further than that. Aside from sleeping, the room serves as a science lab for cooking up weapons and items using his chemistry set, a trophy room used for displaying the various rewards you have accumulated over your schoolyard adventures and a wardrobe. Aside from simple aesthetic value, changing clothes is an important mechanic in the game. If you're not in school uniform on school grounds prepare to get in trouble and if you're not dressed warmly in the winter prepare to suffer the consequences. Dressing well also has an effect on the ladies; don't even bother trying to chat one up if you're not dressed the part.

GRAND THEFT PLAYGROUND

Being a Rockstar game Jimmy naturally has access to vehicles to get around on but unlike in the more adult oriented series, Jimmy can't actually drive (he is a kid after all, delinquent or not) so his choice of vehicles is limited to a skateboard and a BMX. The skateboard is simply a faster mode of transport than running everywhere and capable of performing a few simple tricks (we don't know if tricks will actually feature in the game like stunts and unique jumps in the GTA franchise as yet). The bike on the other hand is more than a vehicle, it's a way of life. Aside from being a mode of transport, the bike is something of a status symbol and Jimmy can upgrade it by completing the mini games in Shop class. The Bike also gives rise to some interesting mission potential. One of the missions we saw had Jimmy sitting backwards on the bike picking off other riders with his slingshot in an on rails shooting sequence.

SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

Ultimately the gameplay of Canis Canem Edit seems to revolve around this social interaction more than it does fight scenes. Sure there is still a good deal of combat that the player will get themselves involved in but ultimately that still plays into the same area – raising your status with one of the many factions in the school. Although we've only seen a handful of the story missions we have been informed that there are mini-missions that can be taken during the down time to increase your standing with the different factions. Be warned though, increasing your standing with one group will almost invariably put you on the outer with another so choose your missions wisely.

Bully will be appearing on store shelves soon, no doubt to more than its fair share of controversy. Undoubtedly the name change will go a long way to alleviating tensions but people should not have made all the fuss in the first place; Canis Canem Edit is shaping up into one damn fine game and a very fitting final hurrah from Rockstar for the PS2. <<

Elebits

SYSTEM: **NINTENDO Wii** ■ CATEGORY: **ACTION/PUZZLE** ■ PLAYERS: **1** ■ DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** ■ DUE: **LAUNCH**

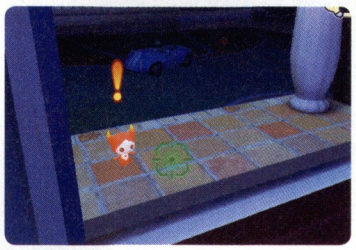
The Wiimote controller is one of the most, if not the most exciting developments in gaming since the move to 3D. The possibilities given to players in terms of interaction with the game world are staggering – it really is simply a matter of how developers see fit to use the control scheme. Elebits, from Konami, is just one of the games on the horizon using the controller in a novel way. As far as back story goes, Elebits revolves around the titular creatures; little benevolent creatures who bring power and light into the world. As fate would have it these cute little buggers have started to disappear, throwing the world into darkness/chaos so it's up to the player to find them.

SHADES OF THE PRINCE?

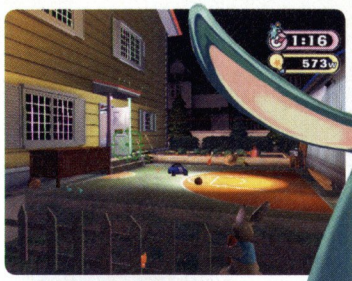
Essentially Elebits is a technologically advanced (and remarkably cute) game of hide and seek with the player. Players are charged with opening every cupboard, looking under every rock, behind every curtain until you find one of the creatures and then capturing them with a Ghostbusters-esque energy beam, bringing a modicum of light back to the area in the process. Capturing escaped Elebits also charges the Wiimote/manipulation tool with Watts. In a basic sense this captured energy will allow the player to pick up and manipulate more varied and larger things, drastically changing the scale of the game. The opening levels will see players searching around single rooms inside houses, only able to lift up coffee cups, brush aside curtains and the like but with enough Watts the player will be powerful enough to pick up an entire house and shake it to see what falls out. Although we have not seen this change of scale as yet we're hoping for something like Katamari Damacy; as the player gains in power their view of the world changes slightly allowing them to see and interact with more things.

Watts are also necessary for the more puzzle like aspects of the game. While the early Elebits may simply be hiding behind or under certain objects in the environment and can be discovered by picking things up, other have to be coaxed out of their hiding places, mainly through use of the technology at hand. An example given to us was of a microwave in a kitchen. With enough stored Watts you can turn it on but aside from going "ping" it won't do much. However, if you've searched around the rest of the kitchen you may have found a bag of microwave popcorn. Placing the popcorn in the microwave and then turning it on will produce food that may entice an Elebit out of hiding.

We imagine this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the puzzle elements but it definitely whets our appetite to actually get our hands on the game. A giant physics puzzle with a Pokemon style catch 'em all twist definitely sounds like a lot of fun to us. <<

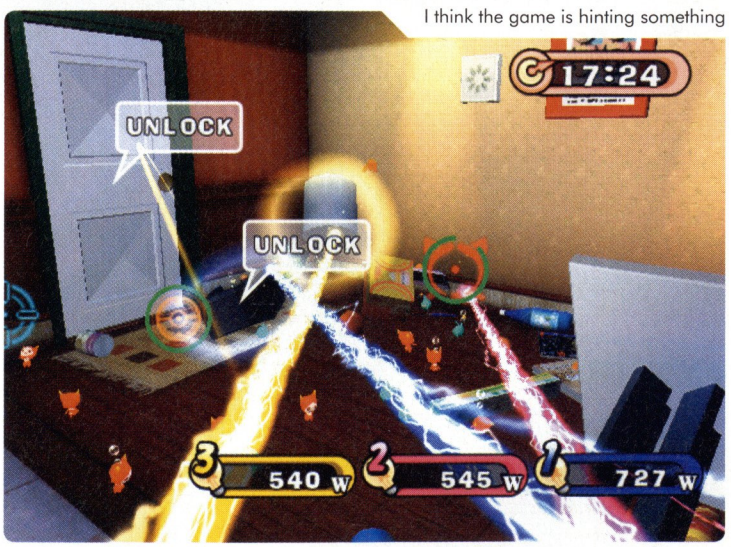


With enough Watts the player will be powerful enough to pick up an entire house and shake it to see what falls out



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Changes of scale on par with those seen in Katamari Damacy

These are not Pikmin



I think the game is hinting something

World in Conflict

SYSTEM: **PC** ■ CATEGORY: **STRATEGY** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI** ■ DEVELOPER: **MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT** ■ DUE: **Q2 2007**

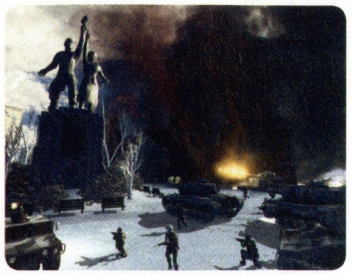
World in Conflict is the action man's strategy game. It combines the best bits of Command & Conquer with the best bits of Battlefield 2. There's no fiddly resource management or boring base-building: you get your units, you get your objectives, and then you get out on the battlefield and blow stuff up. Straightforward and immediately rewarding – that's World in Conflict for you right there.

DOWN WITH CAPITALISM!

We know what WIC is like because we were lucky enough to participate in a sixteen-man multiplayer match of it at a Sierra press event in the US. The game began with each player selecting which side of the conflict they wanted to be on – the United States or the Soviet Union – and then we were asked to choose which role we wanted to play on the battlefield. There are four roles available – infantry, air, tank and support – and each has its own special niche to fill. As with other role-based multiplayer titles, diversity is the key to victory in WIC. You can't expect your team to win if everyone is using tanks. It just won't happen. (We know because we tried - and failed miserably.)

Once we selected our roles, we then had to deploy our units in the field. The number of units you can deploy at any one time depends on your replenishment number – a resource pool that depletes with deployment and refills relative to the number of units you lose in combat. This is a very clever system that happily negates the need for any boring resource management whatsoever. You get your points and you spend 'em on units; you lose your units and you get your points back. Of course, deployment takes time and can only be done in specified areas – so it's not like you can just rush into a firefight and perpetually replace any losses incurred. You've still gotta be careful with your troops.

The gamemode we played was kind of like the Conquest mode in BF2 in that the goal was to take all the capture points scattered across the map within a set time limit. As each capture point consisted of three interconnected nodes, it was usually necessary for players to work together in order to acquire and keep hold of new territory. The best part about this setup is that as you capture more of the map and destroy enemy units, you gain tactical assistance points which can then be spent on... erm... tactical assistance. More points equals better stuff: Fifteen points will get you some rudimentary paratrooper support, twenty will buy a quick airstrike, and fifty – well, fifty gets you the tactical nuke. And let me tell you: that is one bomb worth saving up for. I can think of few things more satisfying than watching scores of capitalist pigs fry in a single brilliant flash of Soviet justice. It's glorious.



As you can probably tell, WIC is shaping to be pretty hot. Even in an early alpha stage over a dodgy network that dropped out every ten minutes, it was still one of the most enjoyable strategy games we've played in a long time. We don't know much about the single-player yet – but if it's even half as good as the multiplayer, it should be very sweet indeed.

DANIEL STAINES

> Fifty points gets you the tactical nuke. And let me tell you: that is one bomb worth saving up for

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Although it might throw out the balance a bit, we wouldn't mind seeing some sea-units added to the roster of available roles. The prospect of launching bombing runs from an aircraft carrier is just too cool to ignore.

Can we still run with "Here comes a chopper" captions?

Supreme Commander

SYSTEM: **PC** ■ CATEGORY: **RTS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-8** ■ DEVELOPER: **GAS POWERED GAMES** ■ DUE: **2007**

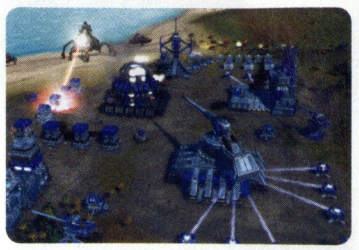
>> Supreme Commander is a new RTS from the highly respected Gas Powered Games, and the focus is on putting the strategy back into the genre. For too long, the team believe, the RTS has been all about micro management, as opposed to strategy, so they're setting out to give you strategic depth, without all the minutia. Whatever the plan, they're well on the way to delivering a very cool title.

WHERE'S THE WORM IN THE APPLE DEMO?

Perhaps the most immediately impressive aspect of the game is the level of scaling available to the player. From the most intimate viewpoint, you can scroll all the way out until you have the entire landmass in front of you. And once you reach a certain height, the game switches from polygonal models to icons, giving you – essentially – a strategic map of the battle from which to command.

While it's intuitive zooming in to various points on the map, the team have gone a step further in ensuring that you have total viewpoint control. If you have dual monitors, you can run two viewpoints at once, and hey, even if you don't, there's a nifty splitscreen option that achieves the same end. With two windows into the action you can mix and match scales and locations, so you can always follow what's going on. Another nice touch is the ability to completely tweak the interface – don't like the control panel sitting on the bottom of the screen? Shift it to one side. Don't like the layout and selection of commands? Change 'em. Best of all, this is only the beginning for a game that's designed from the ground up to be as mod-able as possible.

The background story for the game is an endless battle that's raging across every known sector of the galaxy in the 37th century. Three factions (all human) are duking it out - the United Earth Federation, the Aeon Illuminate and the Cybran Nation, and it's up to you to assume control of the faction of your choosing and guide them to victory. Each faction has a host of unique units, and the team have done a great job ensuring that scale actually means something. It's a sight to behold seeing a squadron of fighter jets launching from a massive aircraft carrier then fighting it out in a pitched dogfight above, like flies buzzing about a sleeping dog. Another impressively huge unit was the Galactic Colossus - a mecha robot twenty times the height of most units that trundles across the map unleashing a devastating laser attack. You might want to send in the nukes to take that one down. Other units aren't large, just powerful and useful. One naval unit we saw simply unfurled eight mechanical legs when it reached the shore and kept going. Very cool.

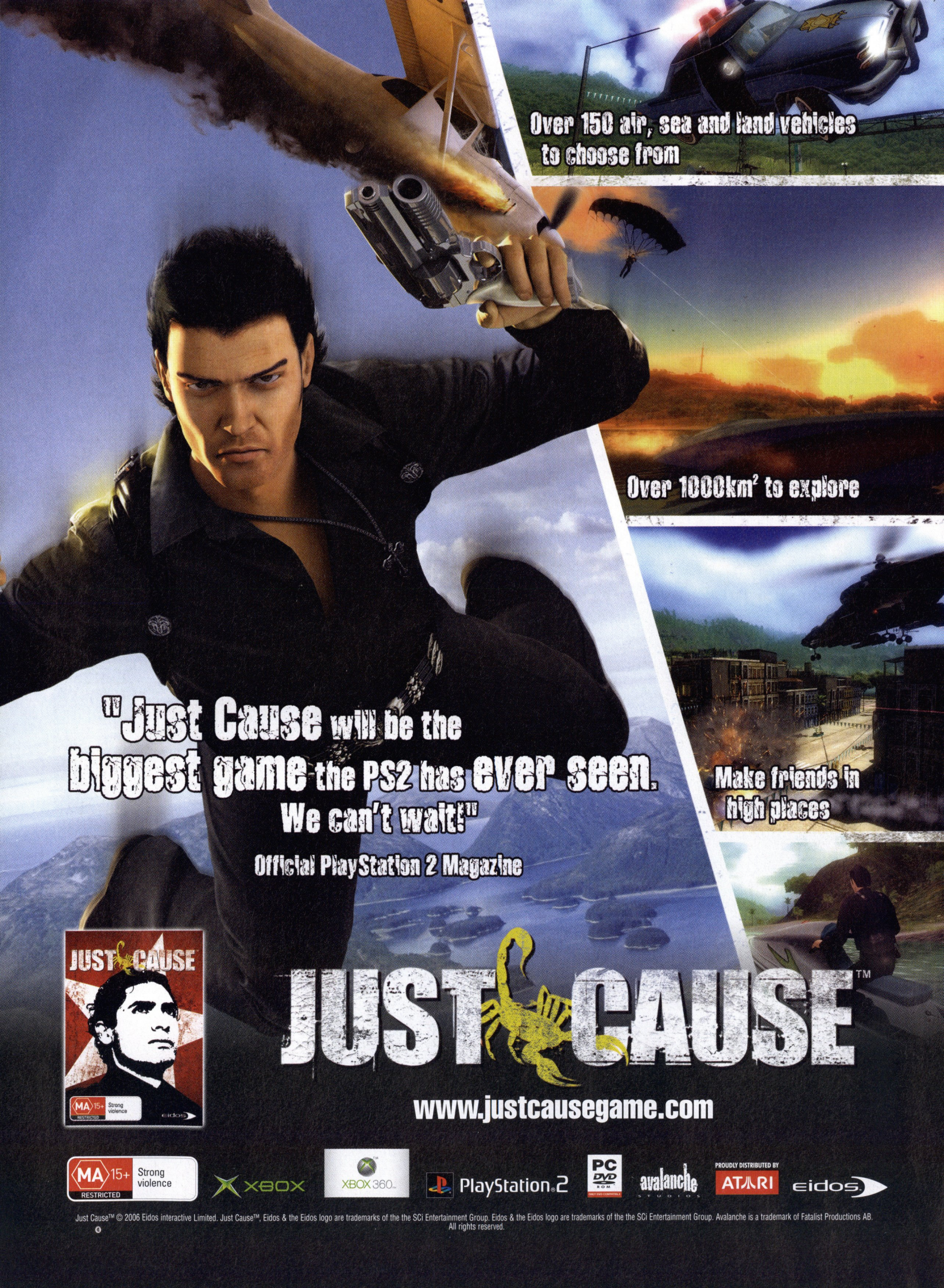


While most RTS' are 3D these days, Supreme Commander takes advantage of this to create truly dynamic battlefields. The engine incorporates sophisticated collision detection and physics so that every single shot fired in battle is modelled in 3D, follows an appropriate flight path through 3D space, and must actually collide with its target to do damage. Sounds like an obvious thing, but this is an important step in modelling a realistic combat zone. It also means you can track strikes on the enemy. Launch a nuke, for instance, and you can automatically track its path from launch to its annihilation of your target. <<

>> It's a sight to behold seeing fighter jets launching from a massive aircraft carrier then fighting it out in a pitched dogfight <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
More info on multiplayer! All we know at this stage is that it will probably be for up to eight players.

We don't remember Red Vs Blue being this high tech



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Dungeons & Dragons Tactics

SYSTEM: **PSP** ■ CATEGORY: **STRATEGY** ■ PLAYERS: **1-4** ■ DEVELOPER: **KUJU ENTERTAINMENT** ■ DUE: **Q1 2007**

D&D meets Fire Emblem – could there be a more perfect pairing than this? What better way to capture all the arcane mechanical minutiae of D&D 3.5? And what easier way to guarantee a balanced strategy game than by using a rule-set thirty years in the making? Also: how many more rhetorical questions will you have to endure before this introduction ends? Perhaps one? Maybe two? When will this madness ever stop?

HOW ABOUT NOW?

The version of D&D Tactics we've seen was a pre-alpha build about six months away from completion. The Kuju guys doing the demo kept stressing how unfinished everything was – how they needed to polish up the character models and improve the framerates and so on. But I don't know. It all looked pretty damn good to me. Sure there were a few minor animation glitches, but it's hard to get uppity about that kind of thing when you're looking at what may well be the prettiest game to ever run on a handheld console.

Ignore the screenshots – they don't do this game any justice whatsoever. Tactics' 3D engine is capable of rendering dozens of character models in a detailed environment with real-time lighting effects that rival those in Doom 3. If you give one of your party members a torch in a dark dungeon, it'll behave like a realistic light-source and illuminate the surrounding area in a flickering glow that casts dynamic shadows off of nearby characters and architecture. And it isn't just for show. As in real D&D, your character's ability to see (or lack thereof) plays a key role in combat and exploration. One thing we learned while watching the demo is that sometimes a little shadow isn't a bad thing – particularly if you've got Darkvision and your enemies don't.

Speaking of enemies - there are LOTS of them. We're talking pretty much everything from the 3.5 Monster Manual – from lowly kobolds and goblins all the way up to menacing beholders and enormous dracoliches. In addition to these nasties, Tactics also features more then 650 items, 146 feats, 216 spells and 24 skills. And of course there are all the usual character classes PLUS an entirely new Psionics-based class created specifically for the game. (Think Mindflayers but not evil and with the ability to manipulate time and trick monsters into killing themselves.)

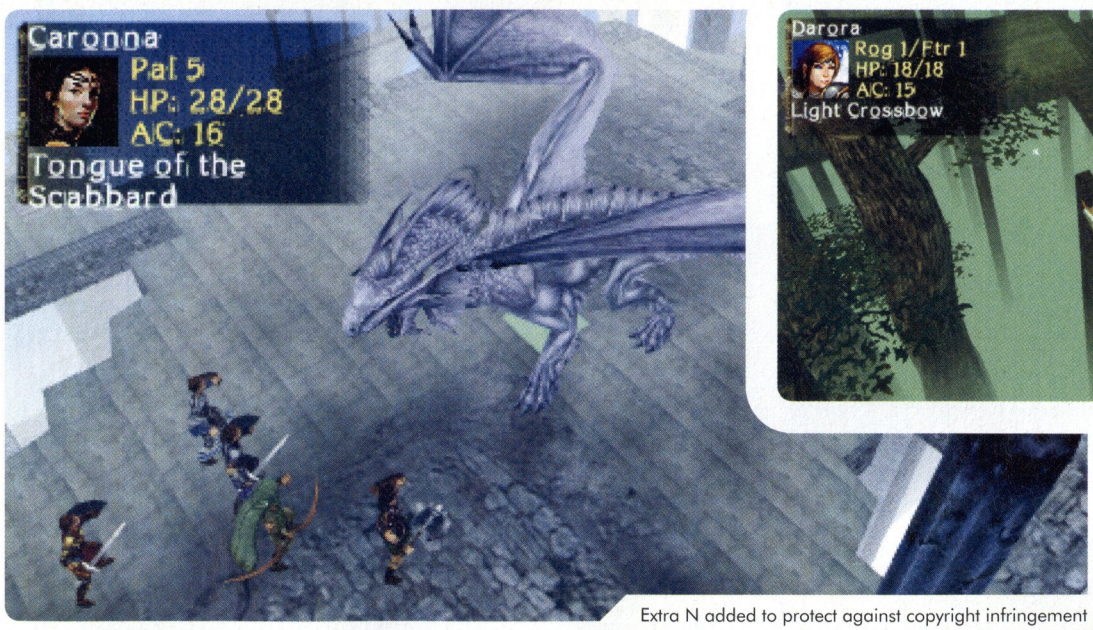
Oh, and one more thing before we finish up: this game comes with co-op. You can play through the whole campaign with up to three friends – either with multiple PSPs over ad-hoc wireless or with just one using a "hot-seat" system where each person takes a turn and then passes it on. As well as that, there is also a variety of competitive multiplayer modes – just in case you'd prefer to murder your friends rather than co-operate with them.

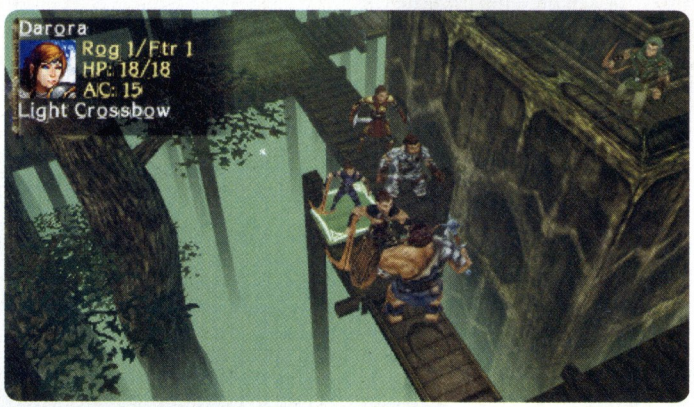
So! That's just about everything we know about D&D Tactics. We reckon it's pretty safe to say that this game is well on the way to becoming a PSP classic. It is exactly the sort of title Sony's handheld has been aching for since launch – and one that could do much to boost the system's flailing credibility in the eyes of hardcore gamers. (Also: Dracoliches!)

DANIEL STAINES

> Tactics' 3D engine is capable of rendering dozens of models in a detailed environment with real-time lighting that rivals Doom 3

[up] Tic Tac Toe D&D Edition





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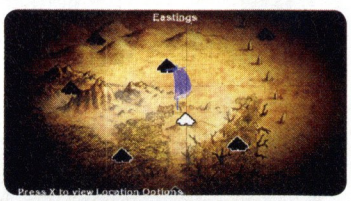
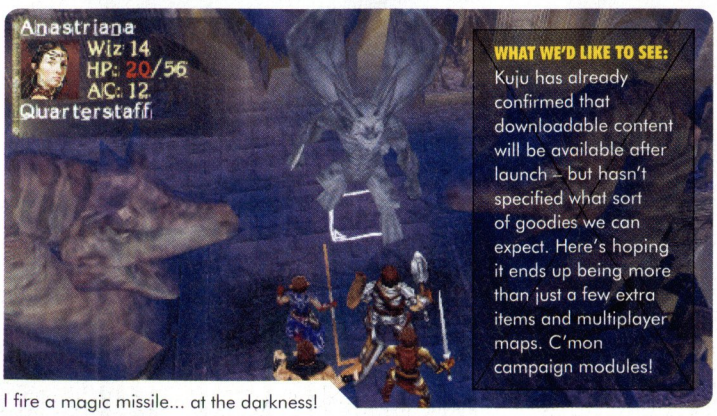




I fire a magic missile... at the darkness!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Kuju has already confirmed that downloadable content will be available after launch – but hasn't specified what sort of goodies we can expect. Here's hoping it ends up being more than just a few extra items and multiplayer maps. C'mon campaign modules!

Tony Hawk's Project 8

SYSTEM: **PS3, XBOX 360** ■ CATEGORY: **SKATING** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI** ■ DEVELOPER: **NEVERSOFT** ■ DUE: **LATE 2006**

American Wasteland was a step in the right direction for the Tony Hawk series, and now the trend looks set to continue. While the hype for Project 8 is all about the game being built from the ground up for next gen, the reality is that while that's certainly true of the engine, animation system etc, the gameplay is still very much the same. So yeah, don't expect a revolution. Expect the prettiest Tony Hawk game to date.

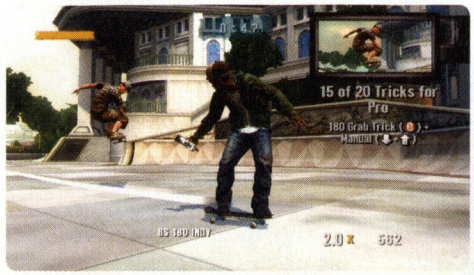
SHADES OF ANIMAL CHIN

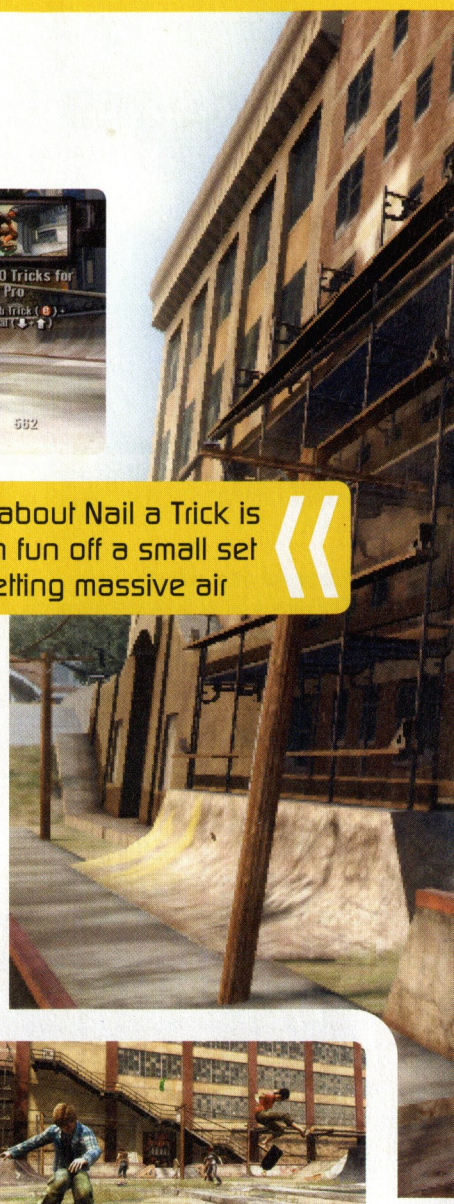
The last game was all about building the ultimate skate park by salvaging and stealing bits and pieces from all over the city. For Project 8, the team are taking a page out of the book of Amped, and charging you with improving your ranking in the city. From a lowly 200, it's up to you to get into the top 8, and hopefully join Tony's new skate team.

To get that ranking up, there are a stack of new challenges. Photo Challenges require you to bust a particular trick for a photographer, Video Challenges see you following a cameraman doing tricks as he shouts them out, and Pro Challenges you already know – meet up with pro skaters like Rodney Mullen and Daewon Song and beat their objectives. Another new challenge addition is Spot Challenges – these are signified by spraypainted notices all over the city, and you can seamlessly take them on as you skate around. You may see a grind challenge painted on the curb. Start grinding from that point and there are three markers to try and get past for the top reward. There are Spot Challenges and tiered rewards for most of the tricks you'd expect – grinds, air, natas spins and so on.

While the main thrust of the game is raising your ranking, you'll also be earning cash, or "Stokens", which are used for buying new gear like clothes, decks and wheels for customising your skater and his/her gear. Stokens are earned in a number of ways, including landing impressive combos and escaping angry pedestrians. Yes, that's right. If you run into a pedestrian a few times they'll get ticked off and start chasing you (with a neat little picture in picture window popping up showing them in pursuit).

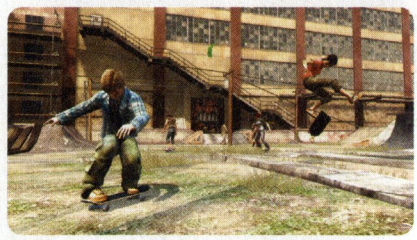
But what about new mechanics? Well, the coolest new addition to the game is definitely the Nail a Trick mode. While Focus mode still allows you to slow down time to bust out amazing trick sequences, Nail a Trick is a very different form of slow-mo. By clicking in both analogue sticks as you ollie, the game slows down and you can use each analogue stick to control a foot, essentially manually flipping the board. This brings a whole new level of style to basic tricks, allowing you to kick out your left foot, hold it while the board rotates, then release when the grip is facing up, landing a simple trick with full control. Of course, it also brings with it some insane potential, not only allowing you to flip one way then the other, but to truly freestyle incredibly complex flip tricks. What we really like about Nail a Trick is that it's just as much fun off a small set of stairs as it is getting massive air. We can't wait to play around with this some more.





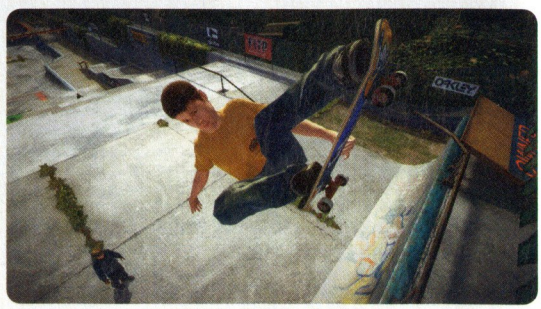
» What we really like about Nail a Trick is that it's just as much fun off a small set of stairs as it is getting massive air «

We mentioned the new animation system in our E3 coverage of this game, but we really have to say it again – Project 8 is skate porn. While non-skate animations are still pretty goofy (when are



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: We've been saying this for years but it would be great if Neversoft slowed the game right down.

This is going to end in tears



they going to fix that terrible 'NPC clapping hands' animation?) and your skater won't always react to the environment the way we'd like, when you see the flatland animations in particular, you'll be sold. From the way your character balances to the smallest nuances in movement, we found ourselves going into focus and transitioning between flatland tricks over and over again just to revel in how authentic it looked.

Neversoft have also used the new animation system to really try and bring some variety to the way each character skates. Each of the five character models you can choose from at the beginning has his/her own distinct set of skate animations; the idea being that they all feel quite different to skate with. Each pro skater you eventually get to use has also been motion captured, so their own style is reflected in their skating.

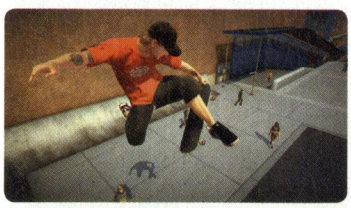
GOING BACK TO (THE) SCHOOL

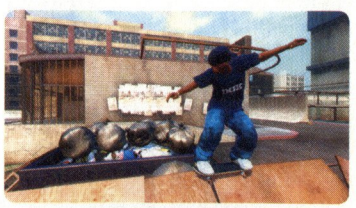
American Wasteland was hyped as being "load free", but the reality was that to get to a new area you were funnelled through a non descript tunnel, during which time the game loaded in the next area. Thankfully those days are past, and Project 8 is one massive open-plan world. We've spent some time exploring and came across a number of distinct districts spanning suburbia, a school, a skatepark, a dilapidated slum area and a towering industrial factory, complete with machinery, interconnecting raised walkways, steel floors, chainlink fences and electrified grind lines. Perhaps the most zany area, however, was the fun park. The Most Lurid Place on Earth, this section is violently bright, and sports a high velocity rollercoaster track to grind along and a huge pink and yellow dragon with ramp-like wings outstretched and a spiked tail you can grind down.

The overall level design seems decent enough, but to help the game feel more like a skate playground, there are numerous areas marked by floating hammer icons. See one of these and you have the option to move trick objects around to create custom lines. Nice.

We should have a full review of Project 8 very soon.

CAM SHEA





Cue civil suit

Bit Generations

SYSTEM: **GBA** ■ CATEGORY: **VARIOUS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-2** ■ DEVELOPER: **SKIP, Q-GAMES** ■ DUE: **TBA**

JONATHAN IKEDA, talkin' bout Bit Generations...

» Nintendo unleashed a special series of original Game Boy Advance games on Japan in July. The seven titles in the Bit Generations range are each priced at just Y2,000. Six of the games were developed by Skip (one of Nintendo's second-party developers, Skip has previously worked on Chibi Robo and Giftpia for the GameCube) while Digidrive was created by Q-Games in Kyoto (the team has also just completed Starfox Command for the DS). With no word yet on a local release, which of these miniatures should you import?

Dotstream

■ This has already become one of our favourite games of 2006. It's incredibly simple - you control a ray of light (a 'dotstream') as it races at a preset speed against five other neon beams. There's no accelerate button, but you can gain a speed injection by running alongside another light. There is a brake button, too, which helps immensely when the course design becomes congested with hazards, and there are also power-ups scattered throughout most race courses.

The thing which makes Dotstream such a blast is its difficulty level. Course design is tight and one crash can be enough to end your race with a nasty 'RETIRE' screen. And because dotstreams are magnetised (which means they can run parallel to each other, separated by a small field, but can not run directly on top of each other), there's a real rush every time the track is narrowed by blocks which form tight passages.

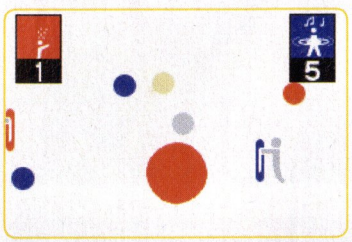
Dotstream's soundtrack plays like prehistoric techno from an alternate reality. It's what Kraftwerk might have done if they'd spent the 80s making tunes for Famicom games. In short, it's brilliant. Just like Dotstream itself, which you should do everything in your power to import.

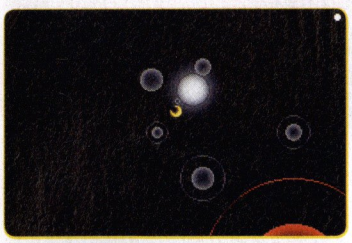
Boundish

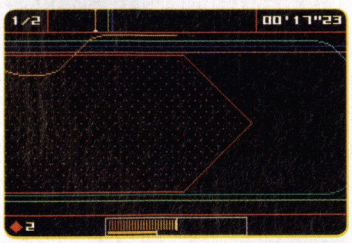
■ What's that Pong? It's Boundish! This is Skip's take on the whole Binatone field of bats and balls. But unlike most retreads, Boundish feels like a celebration of Pong rather than a homage to it. There's a new Juggling Mode, which turns the concept on its side and ends up working like a game of kick-ups. And there are plenty of two-player features, as well, where you're likely to spend most of your time. As with Pong itself, there isn't a great deal of entertainment in the one-player game (although Boundish does have its Juggling Mode as a bonus for lonely players) but in two-player mode it can be fun for ever. Boundish has an interesting aesthetic, too - in places it reminded us of Cosmic Smash, the superb Japan-only Dreamcast game which served futuristic squash. Boundish is futuristic Pong.

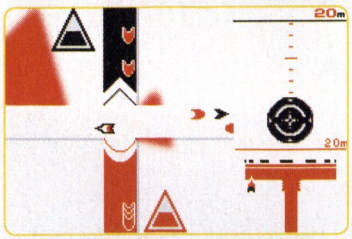
Dialhex

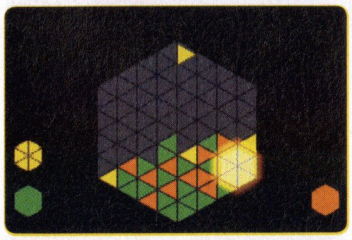
■ Dialhex is a puzzle game set in a hexagonal space. You simply have to match like-coloured triangles by rotating a small hexagonal cursor. As these triangular tiles drop from the large hexagon's ceiling, they slide and pile up at the hex's base. Your job is just to tidy the pile of tiles into like-coloured clumps and, if possible, to get rid of large areas at once. Dialhex is another simple exercise, but it lacks any real spark. It's enjoyable (and again, very difficult) but you'd really be better off with any number of superior Japanese GBA puzzlers (check Panel de Pon, Chu Chu Rocket, or Puyo Puyo Fever).

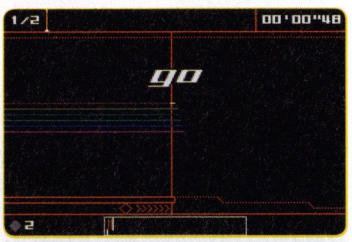


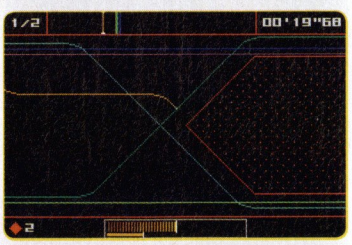


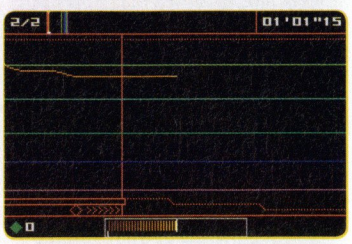


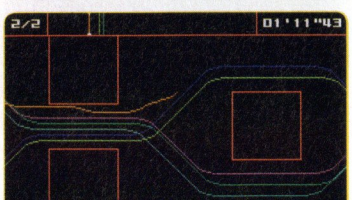


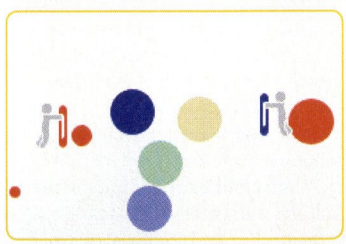


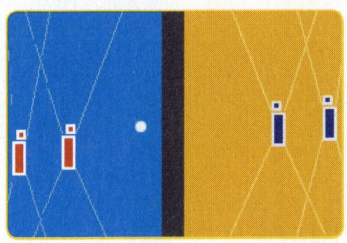


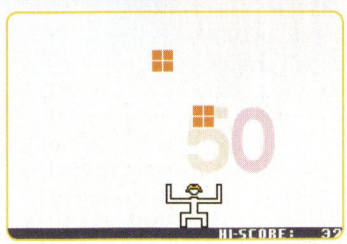


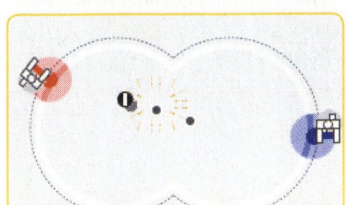


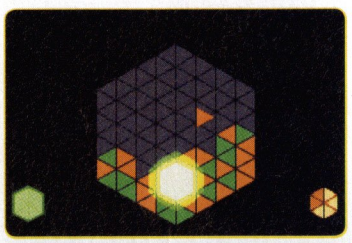


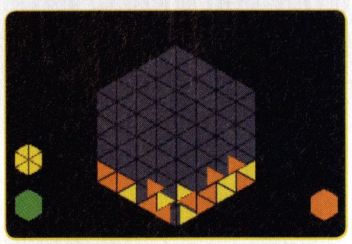


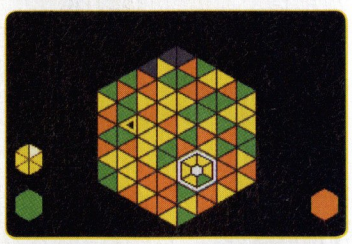


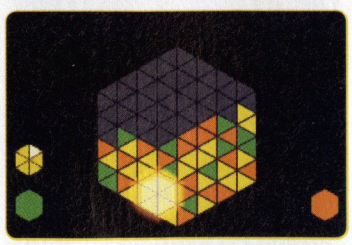


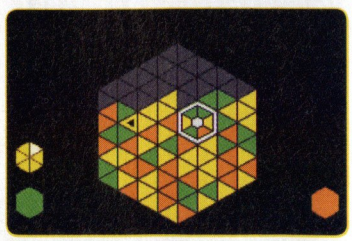






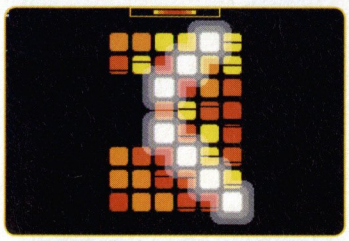


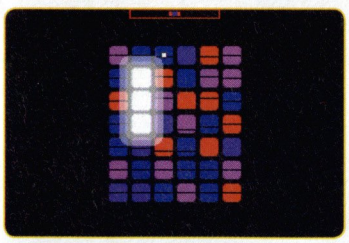


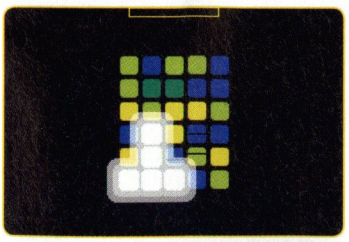


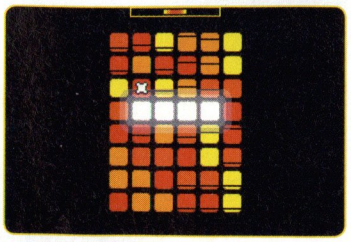
Coloris

This is the best straight, traditional puzzle game of the Bit Generations. It's not a million miles away from Lumines - you simply have to line up coloured squares to watch them disappear (and to hear their replacements arrive) from a grid. It plays perfectly well, the progression through difficulty levels and stage designs is nicely weighted, and there's a two-player facility. It ticks all the right boxes. Over and above those things, though, Coloris sounds unbelievably good. The music is on a par with any Nobukazu Takemura composition (and that is saying a lot) and the synchronicity between what's coming through the speakers and what's being shown on-screen is just about perfect. So, fellow puzzle/Takemura fans, you know what to do!



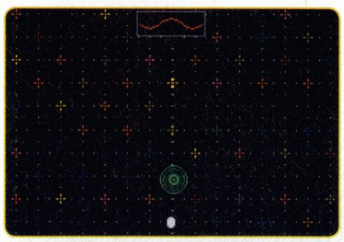


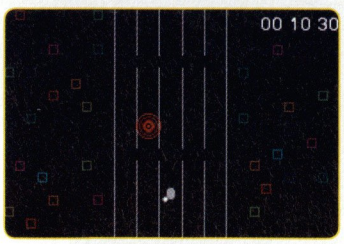


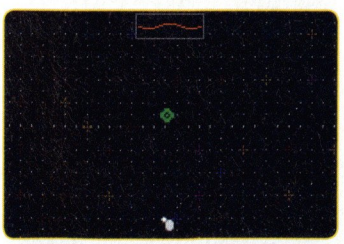


Sound Voyager

Of all the Bit Generations, Sound Voyager is one of the most intriguing concepts. It features seven game types, all based on the idea that audio can become a part of gameplay. Sound Picker mode has you floating around a square surface, collecting new sounds to add to a tune - effectively, you can edit some cool electronica in real-time, through a fun and game-like interface. Sound Catcher mode is a similar type of thing, but in a broader space and with a sound wave display for your troubles. Sound Chase is a weird version of Chase HQ, played on the neck of an invisible guitar. And Sound Cock mode - seriously - is in fact not a Choaniki spin-off, thank goodness, but is a game in which you take care of chickens (represented by bitcrushed cockerel samples) in a kind of sound art farmyard. If you want something a bit different from the rhythm-action norm, Sound Voyager is just the ticket.

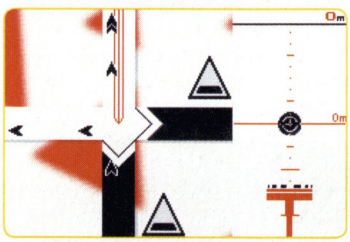


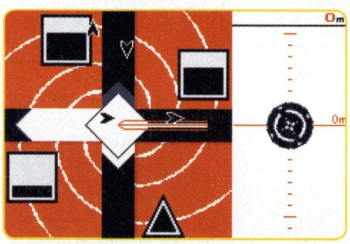


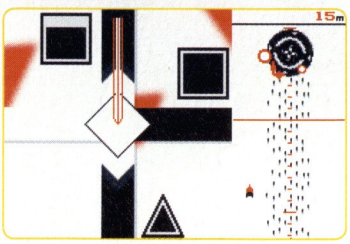


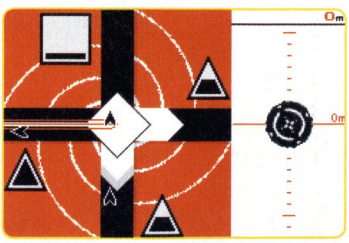
Digidrive

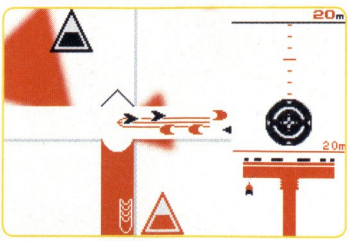
This is the only Bit not developed by Skip, but it still feels at one with the other six games. Digidrive is essentially a new type of puzzle game where you get to control traffic at a crossroad. By tapping a direction on the d-pad and keeping an eye on where traffic is coming from, you can successfully attract vehicles to their intended destinations (dictated by how you decide to park same-type vehicles) and thereby keep the traffic moving. Get it right and you'll eventually enter a trippy warp tunnel mode which lets you channel vehicles much more quickly than usual, for huge combos. Digidrive is the sort of puzzle game that eats your free hours when you're not looking. And with unlockable skins and music, there are plenty of reasons not to complain about this time theft.





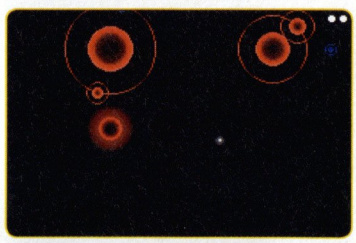


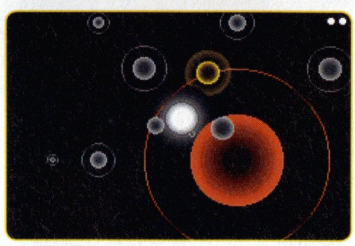


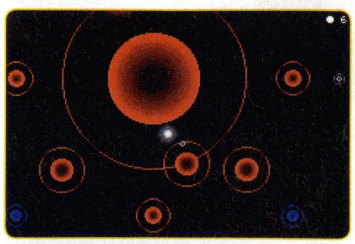


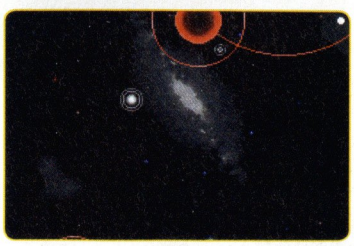
Orbital

Nothing to do with the band, unfortunately, but Orbital is still a great little game. It's the most relaxing of all the Bit Generations: you control a small rock which floats through the universe (there are six galaxies to explore). Your objective is to collect other floating rocks and debris, building your comet into something like a planet, and then, beyond that, attracting moons and other planets to your own planet's ever-increasing field of gravity. It's an inspired idea well executed. Orbital is one to play just before you go to sleep - beautiful, chilled-out dreams guaranteed.









Spyro: A New Beginning

SYSTEM: **GCN, PS2, XBOX** ■ CATEGORY: **PLATFORMER** ■ PLAYERS: **1** ■ DEVELOPER: **KROME STUDIOS** ■ DUE: **NOVEMBER**

» This is Spyro's last chance. If A New Beginning is crap – if it continues the downward trajectory the franchise has been on since its PSOne heyday – then that's it. No more Spyro. He'll be sent straight to digital hell to join gaming's other forgotten mascots like Bubsy the Bobcat and Awesome Possum. In fact, it could be the case that... goddamnit. Okay, I'm sorry, but this needs to be said: "Awesome Possum" is the stupidest name for a character I've ever heard. Did they honestly think that just because they called him "Awesome" everybody would be tricked into thinking that he was? Hey, maybe if I start calling Hitler "Awesome Hitler", everybody will forget that he was an evil despot and he'll become really popular! What a totally rad idea.

OR MAYBE NOT

But getting back to the topic at hand: A New Beginning actually looks pretty good. Developed by Brisbane-based Krome Studios, it is aimed at more than just the eight-to-ten year old demographic that has thus far comprised Spyro's core audience. Obviously it's still very much a kid friendly game, but it isn't "kiddy" – and that's a crucial distinction. It means that there's more to A New Beginning than its non-threatening characters and colourful environments. It means that there's some actual GAMEPLAY here. GOOD gameplay. The kind that you could potentially have FUN with.

Where the last few Spyros were focused on navigating simplistic platform puzzles and collecting magic gems just for the sake of it, A New Beginning is all about the combat. You see, contrary to what his appearance might lead you to believe, Spyro's actually a bit of a bad-arse. Not only can he beat seven shades of rainbow coloured crap out of enemies with his claws and horns, he's also got access to four different elemental "breath attacks" – fire, lightning, ice and earth. Each of these powers can be upgraded as you progress through the game and combine with regular melee attacks to produce devastating (and visually spectacular) combos. It's kind of like God of War in a way – but not as deep and nowhere near as gory. (Probably because Spyro doesn't delight in wanton slaughter like Kratos. But he will. Just you wait and see.)

But gameplay isn't the only thing to have improved with A New Beginning. Vivendi has clearly spent a lot of money making sure that Spyro's return to the spotlight is a veritable extravaganza of high production values. In addition to hiring a professional writer to pen the story, they've also roped in a seasoned composer to produce the score AND somehow convinced several famous Hollywood types to do voice-acting. Seriously: they've got Elijah Wood playing Spyro, David Spade as his sarcastic firefly sidekick, Sparx, and Gary Oldman (!) as a wise old dragon named Ignitus. See? Those are some pretty big names there. I mean – Gary Oldman! Gary-goddamn-Oldman! Sure he hasn't done that much of note lately, but still-! Gary Oldman!

We haven't seen all of A New Beginning yet, but what we have seen thus far has been genuinely impressive. Provided it manages to avoid being overly repetitious, there is no reason why this won't be a thoroughly enjoyable game and a fine return to form for a franchise most of us had considered long dead.

DANIEL STAINES

» Contrary to what his appearance might lead you to believe, Spyro's actually a bit of a bad-arse «

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: David Spade actually put some goddamn effort into his delivery. Seriously, the guy makes every line sound like an absolute chore – a stark contrast to the fine performances put in by Wood and Oldman.

What's Dragon for "you shall not pass"?

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TimeShift

SYSTEM: **PC, XBOX 360** ■ CATEGORY: **FPS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI** ■ DEVELOPER: **SABER INTERACTIVE** ■ DUE: **Q1 2007**

Now this is new: a game about time-control that comes with a multiplayer mode. That hasn't been done before, has it? Obviously there are plenty of single player games out there that let you control time – but multiplayer? The concept seems too complicated to be feasible. But you know what? After playing TimeShift over a LAN with sixteen other people, we can confidently say that multiplayer with time-controls isn't just feasible – it's really fun too.

KRONO KAPERS

It's all about scope. It simply doesn't make sense for TimeShift to give you the same abilities in multiplayer as you have in single player. Can you imagine what would happen if everybody could rewind time whenever they wanted? It'd be chaos – and completely unplayable. That's why Saber Interactive has instead opted for a completely different system based on the unfortunately named "Kronos Grenades". Think of Kronos Grenades as little pockets of time-power that you accumulate automatically as you play. When you throw one, it creates a six-foot bubble of light that distorts time for anyone caught within its shimmering membrane. The extent of the distortion depends on the strength of the grenade: weak grenades slow down time and strong ones stop it completely. The potential for such devices in a deathmatch should be obvious – but here's an example just in case it isn't.

Let's say you're in a heated eight player deathmatch and one of your hated rivals fires a rocket at you. Now let's also say that you've got quick reflexes and, before the rocket hits, you manage to toss a fully-powered Kronos Grenade on the floor in front of you. BLAU! The time-bubble erupts and captures the rocket within its radius, freezing the explosive in mid-air before it can deliver its deadly payload. At this point, you've got a few options. You could either run for it before the bubble dissipates and hope that somebody else is in the area when the rocket resumes its course, OR you could fire your OWN rockets into the bubble and effectively create a giant time bomb that'll take out anybody stupid enough to come within its general vicinity. See what we mean when we talk about the potential of Kronos Grenades? And that's just ONE example of the crazy stuff you can do with them.

Of course, you're not always going to be on the right side of these nasty little devices. Sometimes you'll be the one trapped in that time bubble – an experience that is actually quite surreal. Everyone else is moving like normal, but you're in super slow-mo or pause-mode. Making it even more unsettling is that you can SEE any projectiles fired into the bubble just hanging there – like your own grizzly death is sitting right in front of your face and there's not a damn thing you can do about it. Well, okay, you CAN move around a little bit – even when in a pause bubble – but it's rarely enough to escape the barrage. To be honest, the only thing that struggling tends to change is which of your body parts gets exploded first.

And on that delightful note we come to a close. To summarise most of what's been said thus far: TimeShift multiplayer = radness. In fact, the only downside we can see is that you'll have to wait until next year to play it. Yes, the game has been delayed again, but hopefully that will give the developer enough time to bring the single player game up to the same standard as multiplayer. <<

> Think of Kronos Grenades as little pockets of time-power that you accumulate automatically as you play

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: More escape options for people caught in time bubbles. Maybe there should be a kind of "anti-grenade" you can get or something?

Don't be distracted by the water. KILL!

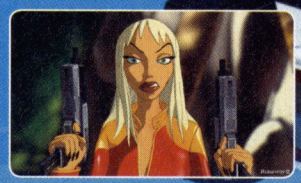
The "Niki Lauda" cannon in action

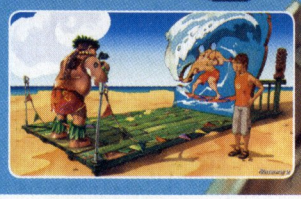
Runaway 2:
THE DREAM OF THE TURTLE

SYSTEM: **PC** ■ CATEGORY: **POINT & CLICK ADVENTURE** ■
PLAYERS: **1** ■ DEVELOPER: **PENDULO** ■ DUE: **VERY SOON**

Contrary to popular opinion, point and click adventure games aren't dead - they just don't make that many of them anymore. There's still a dedicated audience for the humble old genre, which 2003's Runaway proved, selling around 600,000 copies in Europe. In it, you played Brian, a lad with disturbingly square eyes who finds himself embroiled – without knowing why – in a plot full of the usual mix of intrigue, twists, turns and deception. Pursued by the Mafia and taking a stripper named Gina along for the ride, Runaway was well received at the time, and gave the genre a slick coat of paint thanks to its high res visuals.

Developers Pendulo Studios are now putting the finishing touches on the sequel. Once again starring Brian and Gina (although from what we've been told, Brian may not be quite the hero you expect), the sequel looks set to deliver more of the same – rich, cartoony worlds, high quality cutscenes, over the top humour and classic puzzle gameplay. Comprising six main chapters and 100 locations, from Hawaii to Alaska, point and click adventure fans should keep an eye out for this one. We'll have a full review very soon.





Runaway 2

Earthworm Jim

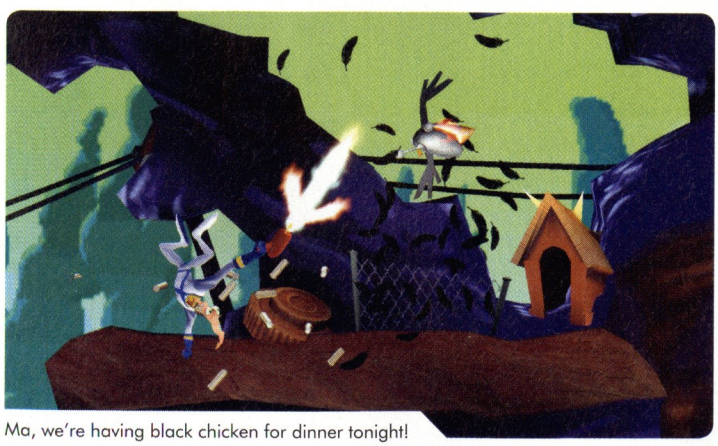
SYSTEM: **PSP** ■ CATEGORY: **PLATFORM** ■
PLAYERS: **1** ■ DEVELOPER: **SHINY** ■ DUE: **MARCH 2007**

You remember Earthworm Jim. It was one of the good games Shiny made before they went crap and sold their souls to The Matrix. You know the one I'm talking about: it had a worm in a power-suit and some sort of space-crow – I think there was a bad guy who was a goldfish or something like that. At any rate, the point is that EWJ is being reinvented for the PSP and we've had a go of a very early version of it.

It's not bad, either. We only saw one level (set in a junkyard) and it was very much classic EWJ. There were hooks for head-whipping, tires to bounce on and plenty of annoying crows to blast with Jim's overpowered pistol. Controls were responsive, the mechanics were intuitive and the graphics – although slightly underwhelming – were at least true to the established EWJ aesthetic.

So who knows? Maybe this'll be the game that proves Shiny is worth more than a few fond memories. It certainly looks decent enough so far.

[up] Head-whipping – not creepy at all



Ma, we're having black chicken for dinner tonight!

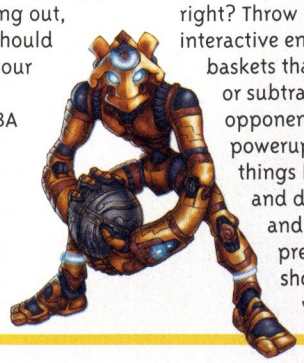
Apparently there's basketball in here somewhere

Hoopworld

SYSTEM: **XBOX 360** ■ CATEGORY: **ARCADE BASKETBALL** ■ PLAYERS: **1-4** ■
DEVELOPER: **STREAMLINE STUDIOS** ■ DUE: **LATE 2006**

Now this is a little bit more like it. If you're getting sick of old games getting rehashed for Live Arcade, then Hoopworld should be a breath of fresh air. Originally due for release on the Xbox 360 Live Arcade service earlier this year, we're honestly not sure when it's coming out, but it's a title you should probably have on your radar.

Take a dash of NBA Street and a pinch of Power Stone and marinate them in some very stylised design and you've got a rough idea what Hoopworld is like. The game has a lot of the flair of Street – you build up points by using a wide array of athletic moves and chaining them together, running simple passes, wall jumps and attacks into one, then banking your killer combo by scoring. Sounds simple right? Throw in multi-tiered and interactive environments, extra baskets that give you bonuses... or subtract points from your opponent, and a range of powerups that let you do things like shoot fireballs and draw in opponents, and the whole thing gets pretty hectic. This one should be great fun with friends.



THE FUTURE OF GAMING

BEN "YAHTZEE" CROSHAW

Twenty years ago videogames looked like arse. I'm sorry, but they did. You considered yourself lucky if pixels weren't the size of breeze blocks and if your console could handle more than eight colours. Even having a joystick with more than one button seemed like decadence worthy of a sultan.

And then you compare those simpler times of childhood with the kind of things games are capable of today, and wonder why the Colecovision seemed so magical at the time. These days, a console that can't render a plain the size of Africa all the way to the horizon is laughed off the shelves and bullied at night by other consoles. Game developers that don't even take the time to render every single pore on a character's skin are strongly advised to seek less demanding careers. The same gamers who not too long ago were firing squares at other squares in their quest to save the square princess now won't be satisfied unless they can see all of their enemies' lovingly detailed internal organs as they plop onto the ultra-realistic ground.

YAHTZEE CAN COOK

In the grand scheme of things, twenty years is nothing. Barely one third of a human lifetime. I have cans of tuna in the back of my kitchen cupboard that are older than that. And yet, the games industry has progressed from Space War to Half-Life 2 in that amount of time, which makes me wonder... where will it be in 50 years? 100? Assuming Jack Thompson and friends don't criminalise them along with films, literature and smiling.

The first question that occurs is exactly how much better game technology could get from the way it is now. We're already sniping the bump-mapped buttocks off a gnat from across the Himalayas and watching as they flutter gracefully to the ground

in a perfect recreation of normal Earth gravity. Games like Red Faction have demonstrated freely destructible terrain, and ragdoll physics are even allowing us to murder somewhat realistically; if you put together every gimmick in every game we've seen so far you'd probably end up with a reasonably perfect facsimile of reality. We're almost at the limit of what can be projected on a 2D screen and controlled with just the movement of the fingers.

Judging by the new generation of consoles, transcending game control beyond finger dexterity seems to be the next step. After all, it doesn't matter how realistic a game can get visually, if we're stuck with a keyboard or control pad it still feels more like piloting Lara Croft by remote control than stepping into her shoes. With the new Wii, and let's be grown-up enough to not make fun of that name for once, Nintendo seem to be making a move towards translating more extravagant bodily movements to in-game equivalent actions.

Lord knows there have been enough lightguns and steering wheel controllers over the years to choke a basking shark, but these were severely limited devices, only capable of one specific kind of gameplay each; you can't play Tomb Raider with a steering wheel or Crimson Skies with a bass fishing controller. Well, you can, but you'd have to be pretty drunk to get any fun out of it.

The Wii's unique skipping rope device is an attempt at a universal controller. The same flick of the wrist that throws a grenade could also pull back a bowstring or spank a naughty schoolgirl. It could be the next step towards total immersion gaming, or then again it could completely fall flat. We won't know that until it's released.

If the Wii's wavey-around system of control leaves everyone cold it wouldn't be the first time Nintendo made a bad judgement call in their attempts to innovate. Step forward the Virtual Boy. In theory, a courageous attempt to bring Virtual Reality into mainstream gaming. In practice, an adventure in migraine headaches, which may well have contributed to Virtual Reality's mysterious disappearance.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO VR?

VR seems like the sort of thing gaming is going to become eventually, whether we like it or not. As discussed above, the evolution of videogaming has always been a long and twisting road to the holy grail of an absolute facsimile of reality, in both graphics and control method. And popular science fiction is still just a little bit too hung up on the possibilities to let the subject quietly die. So it's even more strange how little we see of it nowadays. Virtual Reality was everywhere around the mid-to-late nineties, and you couldn't watch tech news for more than half an hour without seeing some goon in a space helmet waving his arms around, ostensibly to navigate some untextured polygon environment. These last few years we've heard very little. Why?

VR started with a headset, so you could look around the computer-generated environment and hear noises. But then of course you couldn't do anything but look around, so they added magic gloves to interact with things. Then you couldn't move from the spot, so they had to include some kind of omnidirectional treadmill. And then they hit the limit of what current technology can realistically achieve. Perhaps the biggest flaw in the setup was that you couldn't feel, only see and hear; you couldn't reach out and touch virtual objects or feel them in your hand, or lean against a virtual wall. But even if they did invent some workaround for that, like a force feedback suit or something, I doubt anyone could ever convince themselves that it really felt like being there; it would feel like standing in a room kitted out like Robocop with two TV screens strapped to your face. It seems like all the weight of that technology you'd have to pile on would prevent any true freedom of movement and drag you constantly back to reality.

These strapping young men are experiencing something akin to full immersion virtual reality in a German Technological Institute. They are doomed.

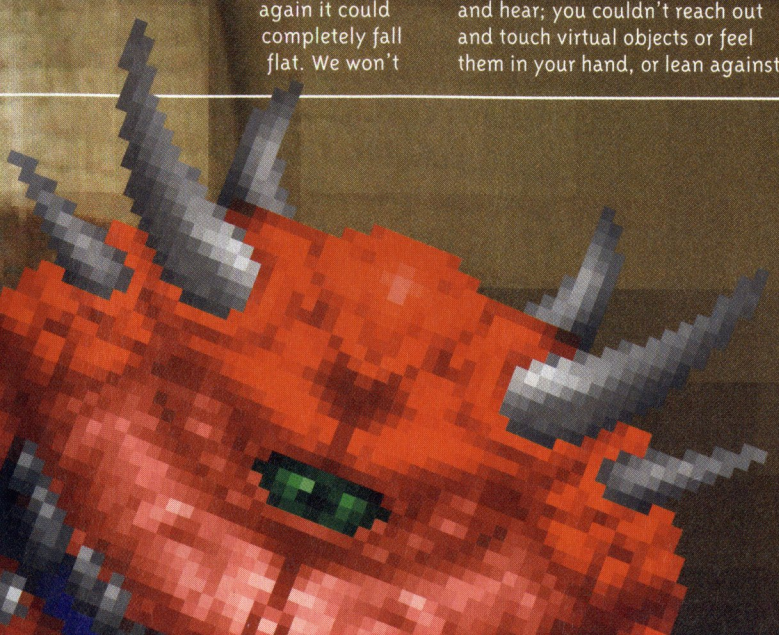
In my opinion, virtual reality didn't work out because it was too ungainly; because technology just isn't advanced enough. So here we turn to the realms of science fiction. What possible alternatives exist?

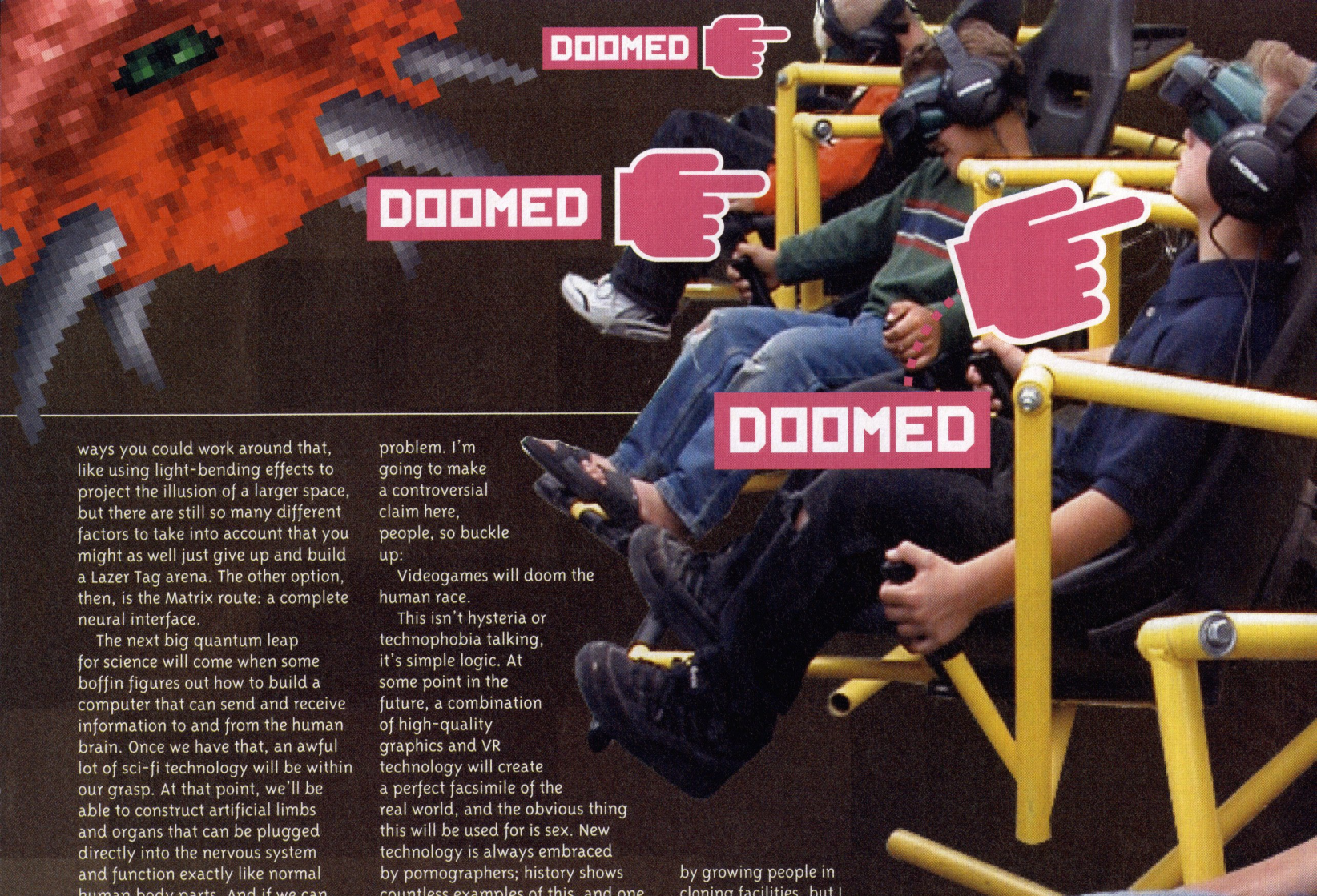
NERDLY ADVICE

Star Trek has provided one answer that haunts the fantasies of nerds worldwide: the 'holodeck'. Rather than encasing themselves in a sense-altering suit, the user simply interacts with a freely changeable environment. In Star Trek this is achieved through a combination of holographic projection and complex arrays of forcefields, but frankly that sounds like a load of old tosh to me. A better system would be to have a room filled with millions of tiny particles (nanomachines, I suppose), which essentially take the role of 3D pixels. A controlling computer would dictate the position and colour of each individual particle, between them forming a detailed environment.

The downside to that, of course, is that the system could only render environments the same size or smaller than the original room, so a large game would require a dedicated space about the size of an aircraft hangar. Maybe there are

"IT WOULD FEEL LIKE STANDING IN A ROOM KITTED OUT LIKE ROBOCOP WITH TWO TV SCREENS STRAPPED TO YOUR FACE"





ways you could work around that, like using light-bending effects to project the illusion of a larger space, but there are still so many different factors to take into account that you might as well just give up and build a Lazer Tag arena. The other option, then, is the Matrix route: a complete neural interface.

The next big quantum leap for science will come when some boffin figures out how to build a computer that can send and receive information to and from the human brain. Once we have that, an awful lot of sci-fi technology will be within our grasp. At that point, we'll be able to construct artificial limbs and organs that can be plugged directly into the nervous system and function exactly like normal human body parts. And if we can invent an artificial eye that can send visual images to the brain, it will be simplicity itself to have that eye send an image of something other than reality.

All you'd really need is some kind of interceptor at the top of the spinal cord that blocks messages from the body's nerves and sends different ones provided by a computer. Once you can override all of an individual's senses, you can make them believe they are seeing, touching, hearing and smelling whatever you want.

DOOM AND GLOOM

Fiction has also shown us how such things can go wrong, of course. Someone could place you into VR while you sleep, and then you spend the rest of your life unknowingly in a construct of reality while someone takes all your possessions or harvests your body for organs; for all you know, that's already happened. And what do you do if your system locks up while you're inside it? How do you control-alt-delete the human brain?

All of which, I'm sure, we'll eventually find workarounds for. But this doesn't touch on the real problem. I'm going to make a controversial claim here, people, so buckle up:

Videogames will doom the human race.

This isn't hysteria or technophobia talking, it's simple logic. At some point in the future, a combination of high-quality graphics and VR technology will create a perfect facsimile of the real world, and the obvious thing this will be used for is sex. New technology is always embraced by pornographers; history shows countless examples of this, and one could argue that the entire evolution of human technology has been fuelled by people looking to find new ways to get off. You can be sure no-one will overlook the possibilities of a willing partner who can provide whatever sexual fantasy your ugly little mind can come up with but will never complain, get or get you pregnant, transmit herpes or nag you to put up the shelving unit.

Initially, consequence-free virtual boffing will probably be an expensive luxury to have, but as time passes and the technology becomes more widespread, there could be a VR unit in every home. So tell me, what possible reason could anyone have for having normal real-world sex when you can have something exactly like it without negative consequence? Without even having to shower afterwards or mutter false platitudes? There're the reproduction and nurturing instincts, of course, but these could be easily fulfilled by hopping into VR and loading up Virtual Baby ™, all the joys of childrearing without the excruciating childbirth business.

Without anyone reproducing, humanity will dwindle. You could try and make up the numbers by growing people in cloning facilities, but I would think all the nerdy cloning scientists would be too busy getting laid in their computers to worry about that. Mark my words: the moment we have a completely immersive videogame interface, we're going the way of the trilobite. And then the dolphins will probably take over, at least until dolphin technology reaches the same level.

But of course it's the duty of the older generation to distrust new technology. Maybe I'm being paranoid. Maybe it's just the old age knee-jerk reaction talking pre-emptively. But if we all wake up one morning to find our organs missing and a scart lead jammed in the back of our heads, then no-one has any right to be surprised. <<

"VIDEOGAMES WILL DO

DOOMED

Future Tech Timeline... and what it means

www.techtimeline.com has an interesting timeline of future technology for the next few decades. Why don't we take a look at the projected development of mankind and consider how each milestone could affect videogaming?

"2007: 600GB HDD standard"

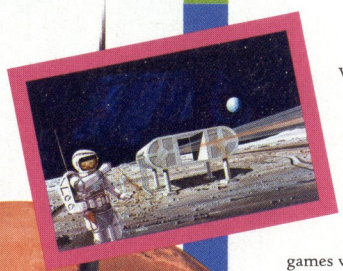
It wasn't too long ago when I could say with a straight face "A 10GB hard drive? That's just ridiculous. How the hell will you ever fill all that?" Then, of course, game developers keep making their new games even more stupidly big than the last. Probably in 100 years everyone will be buying ten million GB hard drives and 600GB will barely be enough to render Gordon Freeman's goatee in Half-Life 3: Episode 6: Chapter 97.

"2009: Human teeth from stem cells to the public"

I do not even know what this means. Okay, okay. At a wild guess I suppose by this year people will be able to grow human teeth in laboratories. That's kind of horrific. And not especially relevant to the games industry, unless someone comes up with a controller that you use by biting down on. Whoa. Hold the phone. That's an awesome idea. I'm going to patent that.

"2015: One-third of the American military's combat vehicles driverless"

Yeah, and if you've ever read Ender's Game you'll see where I'm going with this. In the future you have to be careful when you buy war-themed videogames because you can't be certain which ones are normal and which ones are secretly using you to unwittingly pilot an American tank somewhere in Eastern Europe. There'll probably be some warning signs, though, like the scenery will be suspiciously different every time you play and all the aliens will jabber in Arabic.



"2020: International lunar base"

When you consider how many videogames are based on spaceships or space stations or revolve in some way around space travel, it makes one wonder if we'd still get games like that if we actually did all live on space stations. I'm thinking not. Either we'd have games set in an even more ridiculously technological future or there'd be some historical games where you get to live out the life of a bricklayer or a chartered accountant in 1997.

"2030: Full-immersion virtual-reality"

Well, there you have it, you can mark down our extinction for some time around the end of the century, then. Of course by this point we'll all be middle-aged and decrepit, but hey, those virtual reality prostitutes won't care.

"2033: Humans on Mars"

Not strictly relevant to videogamers, unless they find a portal to Hell, in which case we get to act all smug and knowing for the brief period before a mancubus pulls our faces off. Until then, let's all muse on how 'Humans on Mars' would make a good name for a band.

OM THE HUMAN RACE."

XBOX 360 PERIPHERAL ROUNDUP

Now that the Xbox 360 has settled in, we figured it was about time we took a look at some of the peripherals around...

3RD EARTH OFFICIALLY LICENSED XBOX 360 CONTROLLER

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.BLUEMOUTH.COM.AU** • RRP: **$49.95**

Although ten dollars cheaper than the official Microsoft Xbox 360 controller, it's still hard to recommend the purchase of the 3rd Earth Controller. Officially licensed or not the 3rd Earth controller feels rather cheap when you get it in your hands and there are a few problems with the design to boot. The angle of the arms is slightly more acute than that of the standard controller making the positioning of thumbs on the thumbsticks a little awkward but the biggest problem is that the thumbsticks are just a little too long and a little too loose for truly accurate feeling control. This may sound a little anal but the control scheme just feels sloppy. Although the D-pad on the Microsoft 360 controller is nothing to write home about it comes across as a work of genius compared to the 3rd Earth D-pad which simultaneously manages to feel sloppy, floaty and clicky. The triggers don't feel particularly solid either. If the controller was at a lower price point, say $29.95 or even $39.95 we'd be less likely to point out these shortcomings but at $49.95 you'd be better served saving up another ten dollars to get the official controller. It's wired too.

TRITTON AX360 5.1 HEADPHONES

DISTRIBUTOR: **NETOPT** • RRP: **$255**

The term 5.1 headset is usually something of a misnomer. Usually the so called 5.1 headphones are simple stereo sets with a "virtual 5.1" sound quality. No so with the AX360; these headphones actually contain eight speakers (four in each earpiece). Well technically that still doesn't make them 5.1 headphones as they lack a real subwoofer but pedantry aside they are still some of the best gaming headphones around, though not necessarily the most user friendly.

Connecting the headset to your 360 is a rather simple affair, simply plug the control box in to the mains and fibre optic cable to the AV connector and you're seemingly good to go. I say seemingly because this is where the fiddly bits start. The headset gives you the option to raise and lower the sound level of each of the speakers as well as create a small delay between the front and rear speakers to tailor the surround sound experience to individual demands. Unfortunately the instructions on how to do this are obtuse at best so you'll more than likely find yourself relying on trial and error rather than really knowing what you're doing.

Amusingly, instead of having a true sub, the AX360s fake the sensation of a lot of air being pushed around by a meaty sub by featuring a small vibration control in each earpiece. When the faux sub kicks in the vibration gives the feeling of being battered by a big subwoofer without actually delivering the bass clarity. It's a clever gimmick but a gimmick nonetheless leading to some rather flat bass. This is a problem more endemic to headphones as a whole than to the AX360s in particular however.

That said the AX360s are probably the best gaming headphones we've ever used.

The sound quality (with exception of the rather flat bass) is exceptional. Having the audio broken up into separate channels to be played from separate speakers truly brings game audio to life. Even with the best headphones you will sometimes encounter a flattening of sound, especially when the soundscape becomes too busy. Not so with the AX360. No matter how busy the sound mix became we could still hear individual sounds distinctly. Although the special sense is not as good as a true 5.1 speaker setup, sound direction was also very easy to detect. The headset also comes with a brilliant removable mic boom for voice communication that works seamlessly with Xbox Live. The clarity of the microphone is excellent and the removable nature means that you don't need to worry about having to move it out of the way if you don't want to use it.

The unit itself has an appealing, if somewhat retro-tech brushed aluminium look with nicely adjustable ear pieces and a comfortable head band. Due to the number of speakers in both ear pieces the headset itself is quite heavy and does have a habit of heating your ears to boiling point thanks to the foam cuffs.

If you're serious about your gaming, or don't have room for a full surround sound speaker setup, these will fit the bill nicely.

PLANTRONICS GAMECON X20 HEADSET

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.ANYWARE.COM.AU** • RRP: **$44.95**

According to the back of the box one of the many benefits of the X20 includes the "Ultra-light, sleek design (which) is quick to put on and won't muss your do or snag on your bling". Before reading this statement we really quite liked the minimalist approach of the headset which simply features a monaural earbud and short mic boom but now we're not even sure we are cool enough to use it, not having a do that could reasonably be considered mussable and an almost complete absence of bling. We're not even sure we can review it properly as we don't meet the muss/bling criteria that would enable us to prove or disprove the claim.

That said, the sound quality is decent for a single ear bud, the mic is more sensitive than it appears (though still somewhat dull when it comes to the reproduced sound) and it is small enough that it won't get in the way of your gaming, bling or no. If you're after a lightweight and attractive headset for your 360, this is a great choice.

3RD EARTH XBOX 360 DVD REMOTE

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.BLUEMOUTH.COM.AU** • RRP: **$29.95**

Very little really needs to be said about the 3rd Earth DVD Remote. It's not a bad piece of design, it does what it is supposed to and is a fair bit cheaper than the official controller. That is because the 3rd Earth controller is solely for the Xbox 360 and does not feature any of the extended Media Centre PC capabilities of the Microsoft Universal Media Remote. Still, if you didn't buy a Premium pack and you're after a decent remote for your 360 to turn it into a DVD player, for $30 you could do a hell of a lot worse.

XB36006 SYSTEM MESSENGER BAG

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.BLUEMOUTH.COM.AU** • RRP: **$69.95**

Yes it's a bag. A bag for carrying around your Xbox 360. Sure that's kind of boring but for the price you're getting a rather attractive bag with more than enough padding to keep your 360 safe in transit with enough left over space that you can fit the chunky power adaptor, four controllers, the AC cord, AV cables and a remote control. The design would be more comfortable if it were a backpack (carrying a 360 for extended periods of time is just as tiring and uncomfortable as it sounds) and the shoulder strap definitely needs more padding but gripes aside it's probably the best budget priced dedicated Xbox 360 carry bag on the market at the moment.

JOYTECH 9200 DIGITAL LCD MONITOR FOR XBOX 360

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.JOYTECH.NET** • RRP: **$299**

We honestly can't see a great deal of point to a small portable LCD monitor for the 360. At $299 it is about $100 cheaper than an entry level 15" LCD TV (capable of 720p resolution) and about $50 cheaper than a reasonably sized TV capable of 480p - the native resolution of the 9200. Sure it's compact and takes up little space but the 9.2" screen isn't really big enough to play at a distance and the Xbox 360 is too hot and cumbersome to have on your lap for any extended period of time. The 360 is also a bit of a beast when it comes to power usage so unless you have a generator in the car it's not like you can plug it in and have a play in the back seat, especially considering that the monitor requires a separate power source. That said the 480p widescreen is crisp and only shows a little motion blur, and the SRS capable stereo speakers are quite decent. Amusingly, the 9200 boasts two headphone jacks for multiplayer, though how two people could sit close enough to each other to see the screen without being on each others laps is beyond us.

MICROSOFT XBOX 360 PLAY AND CHARGE KIT

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.XBOX.COM.AU**
RRP: **$169**

In this age of lithium ion it seems a little strange that we're still tethered to AA batteries in our 360 controllers, but at least Microsoft have come up with a great solution. Once you've picked up one of these kits, you just slot in the NiMH rechargeable pack into the battery compartment and get playing. When the juice starts to run low, simply plug the included cable into your controller and 360 and keep playing while it recharges! While it takes a few hours to recharge, once you're done you'll get a solid 30 or so hours before you need to charge again. It's been out for a while now, but this is an invaluable part of any Xbox 360 setup.

JOYTECH 540C CONTROL CENTRE

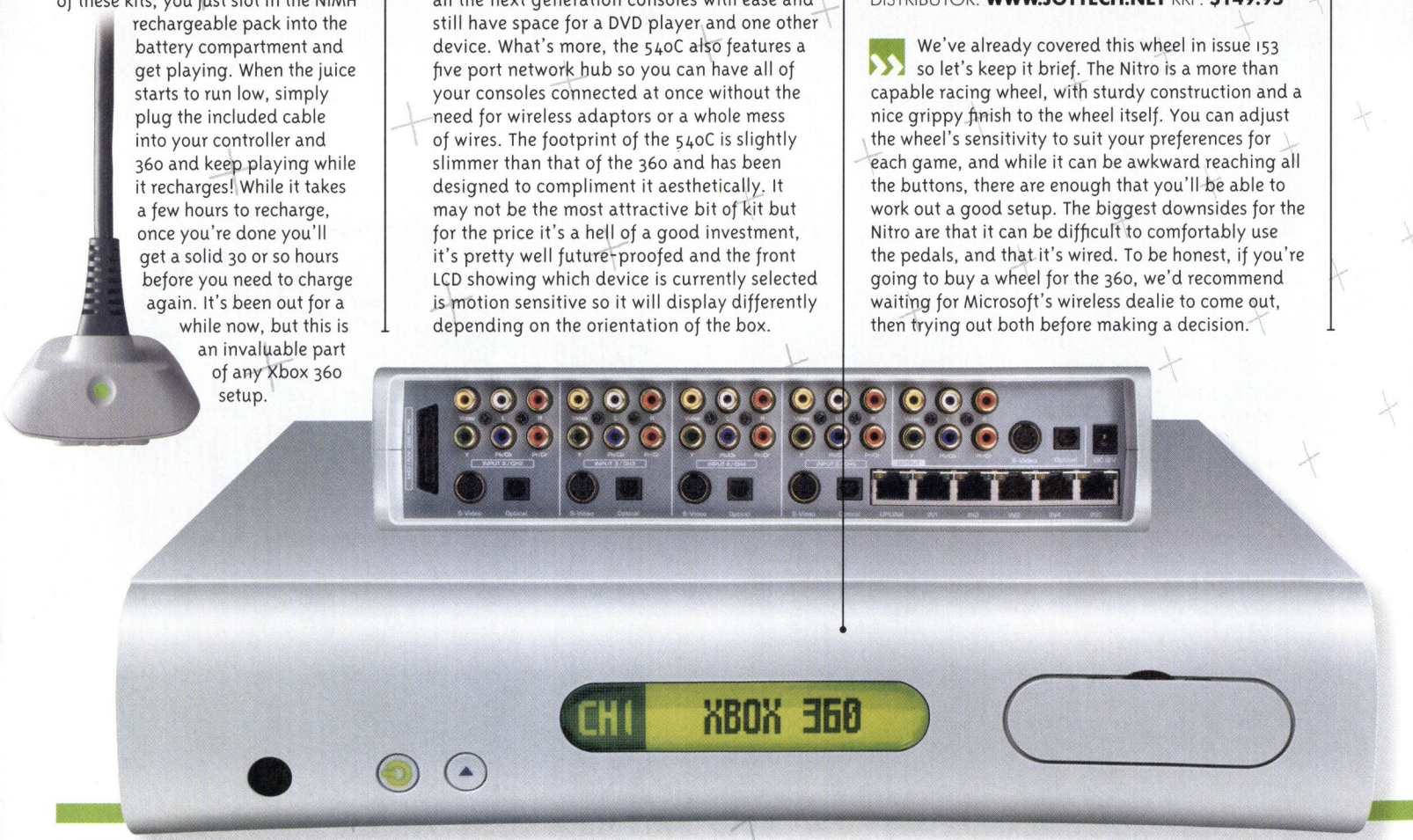
DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.JOYTECH.NET** RRP: **$169**

If you want to connect a lot of high def devices to a high def TV this is the piece of kit for you. Featuring five high definition connections, one dedicated 360 connection and 4 HDTV ready component video inputs which can also be used as 5 composite video and stereo audio inputs or 5 s-video inputs as well as 4 digital audio inputs, the 540C can fit all the next generation consoles with ease and still have space for a DVD player and one other device. What's more, the 540C also features a five port network hub so you can have all of your consoles connected at once without the need for wireless adaptors or a whole mess of wires. The footprint of the 540C is slightly slimmer than that of the 360 and has been designed to compliment it aesthetically. It may not be the most attractive bit of kit but for the price it's a hell of a good investment, it's pretty well future-proofed and the front LCD showing which device is currently selected is motion sensitive so it will display differently depending on the orientation of the box.

JOYTECH NITRO RACING WHEEL

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.JOYTECH.NET** RRP: **$149.95**

We've already covered this wheel in issue 153 so let's keep it brief. The Nitro is a more than capable racing wheel, with sturdy construction and a nice grippy finish to the wheel itself. You can adjust the wheel's sensitivity to suit your preferences for each game, and while it can be awkward reaching all the buttons, there are enough that you'll be able to work out a good setup. The biggest downsides for the Nitro are that it can be difficult to comfortably use the pedals, and that it's wired. To be honest, if you're going to buy a wheel for the 360, we'd recommend waiting for Microsoft's wireless dealie to come out, then trying out both before making a decision.



COMING SOON

XBOX 360 WIRELESS HEADSET

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.XBOX.COM.AU**
RRP: **$69.95** • AVAILABLE: **23RD NOVEMBER**

Gather round readers and we'll tell you a True Gaming Story. Twas a fine summers day, and J Allard was kicking back playing some DOA4, as he was wont to do. As he paused to stroke his smooth luxuriant bald head, a thought occurred to him. "Why," he asked himself, "do I have a wireless controller, but still have to plug my Xbox Live headset into it?" And this, dear readers, is how the Xbox 360 wireless headset was born. And while we've yet to spend much time with it, we're sure that if Peter Moore were here, he would describe the ergonomic design and enhanced audio quality as "the zen of gaming"... but we won't hold that against it.

XBOX 360 WIRELESS RACING WHEEL

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.XBOX.COM.AU**
RRP: **$199.95** • AVAILABLE: **30TH NOVEMBER**

Now this idea we like. Who better to provide input on the mechanics and aesthetics of a racing wheel than the developers behind the games that will most utilise them? Yes, in putting together this puppy, Microsoft went straight to the source, asking the creative minds behind the Forza and Project Gotham Racing franchises to provide input. The result should be the best wheel on the market for 360, and it's wireless to boot!

XBOX LIVE VISION CAMERA

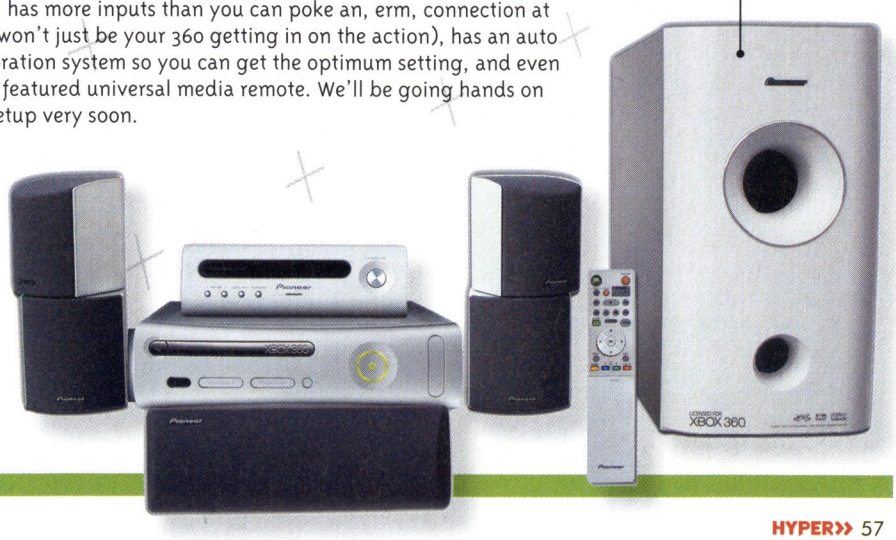
DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.XBOX.COM.AU**
RRP: **$59.95** • AVAILABLE: **26TH OCTOBER**

We've only had the chance to briefly play around with this one (creating a Cam soldier model for everyone else to shoot in Vegas) but we like what we've seen so far. Not only will you be able to map your face into games at a decent resolution, but this is going to make Xbox Live an even more social space. Take your own gamertag snap, send photo messages, even video chat with friends and nemeses in real-time. Still photos are taken at 1.3 mega pixels and video runs at 30fps. Not bad! Let's just hope the EyeToy style games are worth playing...

PIONEER HTP-GS1 XBOX 360 HOME THEATRE SYSTEM

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.PIONEER.COM.AU** • RRP: **$699** • AVAILABLE: **VERY SOON**

This officially licensed set of 5.1 speakers from Pioneer promises to be all things to all men. Or at the very least to bring your sound system up to spec with your spanking new high def display. Designed to perfectly complement the design of the Xbox 360, and to get the most out of its advanced audio hardware, the HTP-GS1 pumps out 600 watts RMS, has more inputs than you can poke an, erm, connection at (so yes, it won't just be your 360 getting in on the action), has an auto room calibration system so you can get the optimum setting, and even has a fully featured universal media remote. We'll be going hands on with this setup very soon.



GEAR4 SONIC BOOM

RRP: $169.95 / www.gear4.com

The speakers on the PSP are definitely one of the weakest aspects of the machine – why Sony thought we'd want the sound directed nippleward as we play I have no idea. In any case, anyone who's serious about their PSP knows that a good pair of headphones are a necessity. Gear4 meanwhile, have decided that headphones don't go far enough, and have put together this neat little 2.1 speaker system. If you want to watch a UMD movie (unlikely we know), or listen to music (far more likely), simply slot your PSP into the unit. When gaming, however, you can simply use the included two metre long cables to run your sound through the system (and charge it too), so you can sit back and enjoy

It's not exactly hard to plug your PSP into your stereo, but the Sonic Boom speakers actually put out pretty decent sound, with reasonable bass. You can also plug in other devices, from iPods to laptops.

ALTEC LANSING INMOTION IM500

RRP: $169.95 / www.audion-mm.com

If you do a lot of traveling and want to take a slice of music with you on the road, then this flat panel speaker system from Altec Lansing may just fit the bill. Designed specifically for the iPod nano (although it does have an auxiliary input so you can plug in other devices), it has a similarly sleek form factor, and once you've slotted your nano in on the front panel it's a very cute piece of kit. It's quite impressive too. While you're not going to get much bass, the sound quality is actually surprisingly good – nicely rounded, and you can turn them up a fair bit without distortion. You can plug the system into a wall outlet, or simply insert 6 AA batteries into the back, which will net you over seven hours of listening pleasure. And when you're done, simply fold up the panels at the base and the whole thing is no bigger – or heavier – than most paperbacks.

THERMALTAKE ARMOR JR AND BIGWATER 735

RRP: $259 (ARMOR JR), $249 (BIGWATER 735) / www.thermaltake.com.au

Available in silver and black, this new case from Thermaltake takes the full-tower Armor design and downsizes it to a mid-tower case. Attractive to look at, the system sports hinged aluminium panels on either side at the front, giving it an armour-like appearance (hence the name), further accentuated by the grilled bays behind. Turn it on and the front fan lights up in neon blue – pointless, but cool nonetheless.

As you'd expect, the design is tool free, the HDD bay is removable, there are 12cm fans at front and back (and the front intake fan sits in front of the HDDs ensuring they stay as cool as possible) and as is becoming standard on many Thermaltake cases, there's a little lid on the top of the case with USB 2.0 and 1394 ports underneath. Handy.

Thermaltake also sent us out a cooling system to check out with the case – the Bigwater 735. It's kind of surreal having clear tubing running through your case, emitting a radioactive green glow, but for the overclockers this system keeps your CPU significantly cooler than a stock heat sink, allowing you to really push the limits of your hardware. It's pretty straightforward to install too – although actually fitting everything inside the box can be kind of tricky. Still, what systems like the Bigwater 735 represent is a shift; cooling systems - once the domain of the ultra hardcore - are now accessible to anyone who wants them.

DS LITE PREMIUM PACK

RRP: $29.95 / www.bluemouth.com.au

If you've gone and lost your DS Lite's stylus already, then there are several ways to replace it. If you're especially skilled at whittling, for instance, you could fashion yourself a new stylus from the nearest Birch tree. But that's not for everyone. A more straightforward method would be to pick up this DS Lite "Premium Pack". In it you'll find two replacement stylus', a hard case, a USB car charger adaptor, headphones, a screen protector adhesive, game cases, a screen cloth and wrist straps. The pack even has a thumb nipple (well, that's what it looks like) with a stretchy strap which you place over your thumb to use for stylus control. We tested it with Starfox Command and Metroid Prime: Hunters and it worked quite well. So there you go, whittling may not be all it's cracked up to be after all.

ASUS EN7600GT/ HTDI/256M

RRP: $379 / WWW.ASUS.COM

How seriously do you take your home theatre setup? If you're the kind of gamer who baulks at the idea of playing Prey or Half-Life 2: Episode One through your monitor, then this card may be the one for you. The Asus EN7600GT comes packing a DVI out, S-video out, SPDIF in and HDMI out. Yep, for games you can output a digital signal straight from your computer to your HDTV or projector, with no signal loss, then switch back to your monitor for everyday apps. Or, if you've got a killer monitor, you can utilise the dual–link support (running both outputs together) for display resolutions up to 2560X1600.

The card comes with "Splendid Video Intelligence Technology", which is designed to detect usage of different video applications and to optimise the picture accordingly, as well as dynamically adjusting depth and colour intensity in real-time. The system lets you choose from a number of display modes - Standard, Game, Theater, Scenery and Night, and even has three skin tone options for getting your picture just right.

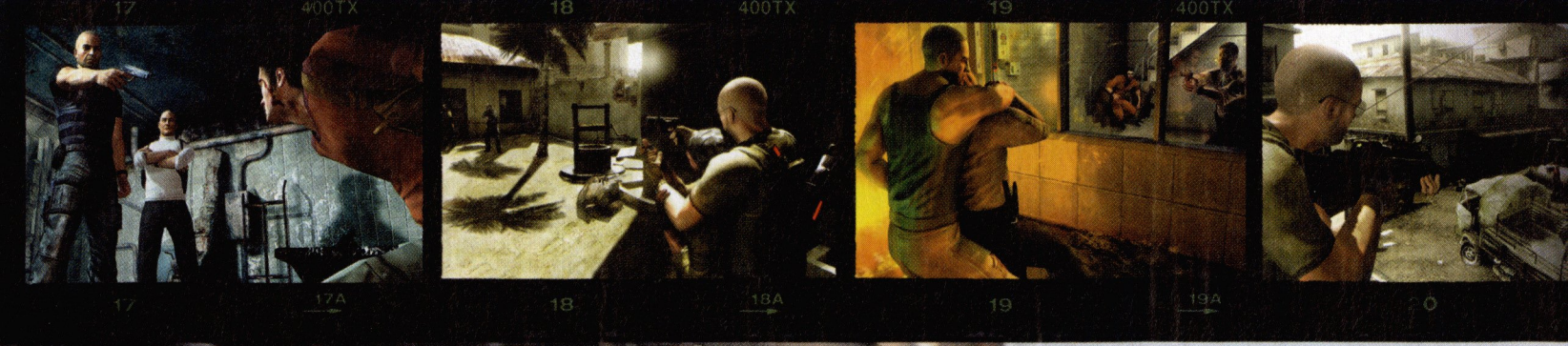
This PCI Express card has 256MB GDDR3 memory and a 560 MHz GPU. It's very much a mid range card, so don't expect your eyes to melt from the onslaught of eye candy, but for the gamer on a budget who also wants to run home theatre, this is an option worth checking out.

SKULLCANDY SK-PRO

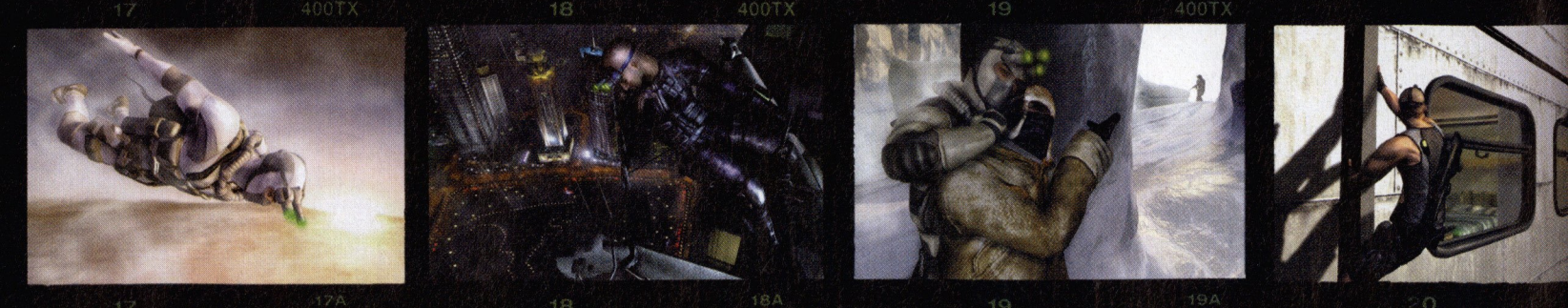
RRP: $199.95 / www.skullcandy.com.au

There's nothing like a chunky pair of headphones to really get the most out of your portable music player, and Skullcandy's SK-Pro headphones more than fit the bill. The massive bins are lined with soft leather to keep your ears comfortably ensconced, while DJs will appreciate the fact that they tilt back, allowing you to easily sit one behind an ear. Style junkies will no doubt dig the nod to old school design in the thick, heavy lead - complete with coiled section, and overall the look is pretty damn nice.

The design is chunky and the build quality is sturdy, but most importantly, the sound quality these things put out is top notch – warm and rich, you get what you pay for. We also like the fact that (according to the warranty card) if you trash the headphones while "running into a wall, getting run out of town... beating your boyfriend unmercifully, getting beat down by the man, blown up in accidental experimentation with flammable substances..." and so on, you'll get a 50% discount off a fresh pair.



WHICH SIDE ARE YOU FIGHTING FOR?



MA 15+
RESTRICTED
Strong violence

XBOX | XBOX 360 | XBOX LIVE | PC DVD ROM | NINTENDO GAMECUBE | PlayStation 2 | MOBILE VERSION gameloft.com | UBISOFT

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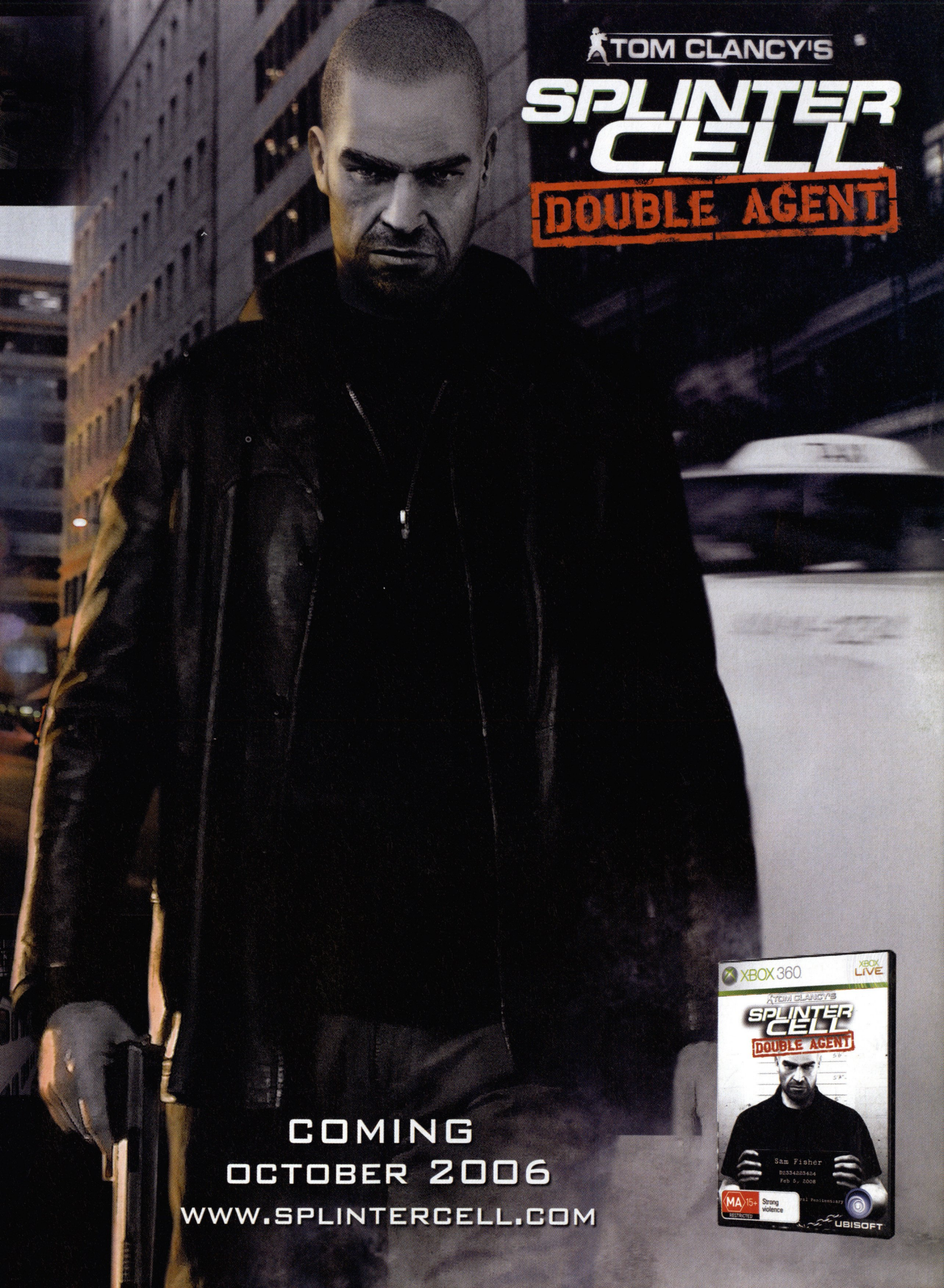
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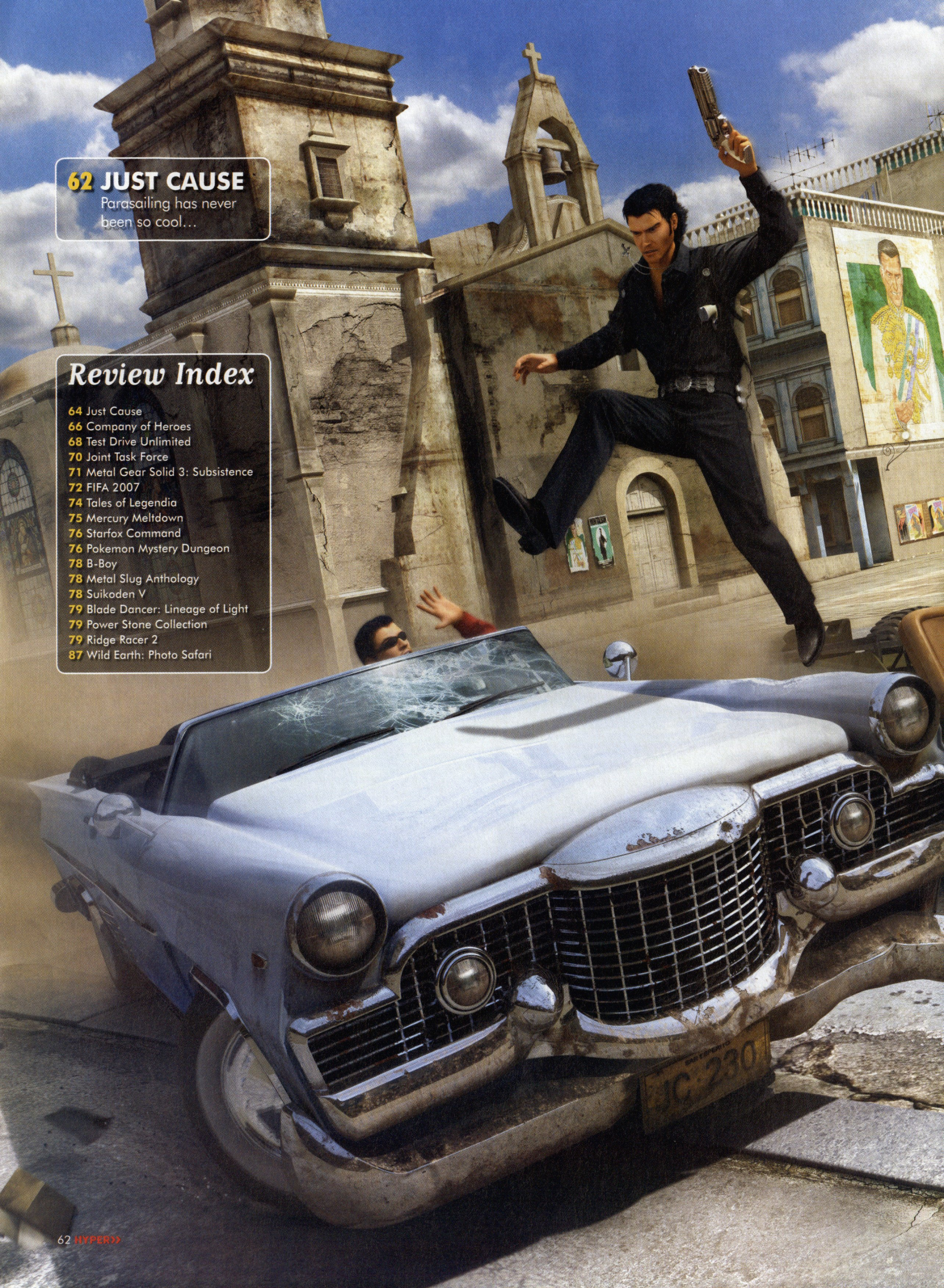

62 JUST CAUSE
Parasailing has never been so cool...

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Reviews

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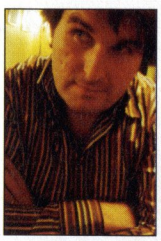
SEAMUS BYRNE

Avatar pissing contests



Is the biggest reason for playing an MMO to show off the cool shit your character has acquired? Taking a look at some research on the success of World of Warcraft, you can make a good argument that is the case for most players.

The greatly respected Palo Alto Research Center — best known for developing the modern GUI back in the '70s —has been doing some census research into the way people play WoW. One of the most surprising discoveries is paradoxical: most WoW players almost exclusively play by themselves.

Why play an MMO by yourself when there are so many good solo RPGs on the market that don't require subscription fees? Fees that could cover the cost of a whole new game every few months. Oblivion is just one great example of a game that offers dizzying RPG depth minus the fees. But I think it is a good example of why an MMO is, for many, more about the passive social interactions more than genuine collaborative or combative play.

'Social' for most, it seems, is really about sharing an in game chat system for general chit chat (which so often annoys those of us who want in game chat to be about the game and not about Chuck Norris). Odds are good the Chuck Norris folk are playing solo — who groups with people who have nothing better to contribute?

Even more importantly, what an MMO offers the solo player is a place to show off the cool gear they've accumulated. If you're tired of questing and grinding sometimes, you can go and stand around a city. Not just to show off, but to check out other people's gear — and try to work out how to get the good stuff for yourself.

Oblivion shows perfectly what a connected world of gamers wants to do with the spoils of their efforts even in a true solo RPG, but one where piecemeal items and character customisation are part of the fun. A quick Oblivion search online pulls up many message boards full of character screenshots. Players are desperate to show off how cool their character is! Anywhere they can find an audience, they'll drop a screen of their avatar (even when they actually look pretty crappy — people are often proud of the darndest things).

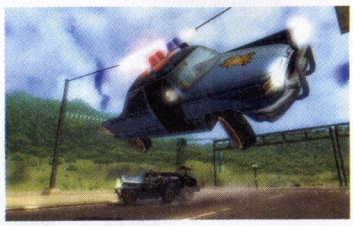
City of Heroes offers another good example of playing to show off. For many, they maintain subscriptions just to build new heroes, who will do nothing but stand around in major cities and show off their cool outfits. Players even hold impromptu costume competitions. Again, this isn't exactly social play. This is an avatar pissing contest, where the real 'play' is taking place as a solitary pursuit.

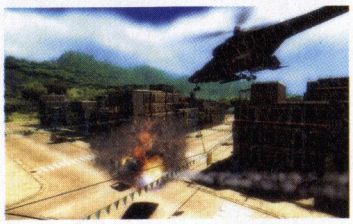
Consider for a moment WoW as a game that, for most players, is a largely solitary pursuit with the bonus of cities to go to for trade and character comparison. What if Oblivion offered a non-combat multiplayer social environment for trade/comparison? Could such a model create a fork in the way MMOs are designed? On one hand we would have heavily collaborative games for genuine massive players, with subscription fees attached. On the other, light collaborative environments that could have multi-avatar environments with little game mechanic necessary. Just social and trade options, delivered for free through systems like Windows Live (and Live Anywhere).

I hope we do see more systems for live avatar interaction in otherwise solo games. Some standardised systems like Live could make it an easy implementation, but the value to gamers would be huge — and would make for some interesting pressure on the MMO scene for how they maintain the more social subscriber base.

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM - What's it all about?

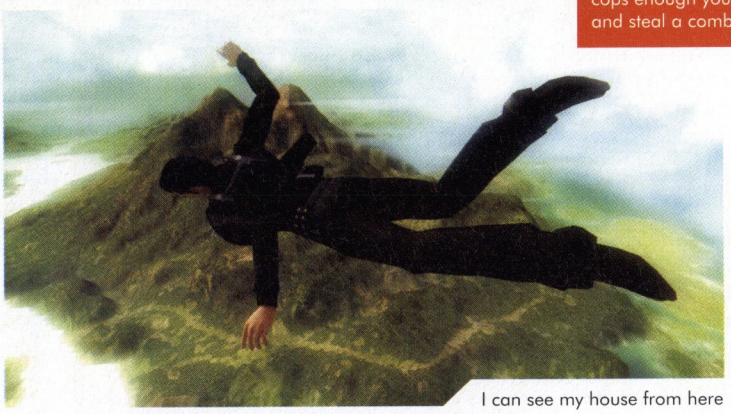
0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
These games both suck and blow... amazing, really	Let these babies fly under your radar, they ain't worth it	RESCEPT - these games don't demand it (or correct spelling)	Hardly two thumbs up territory... but maybe one	Yes yes yes these games rock! Worthy of your valuable time	Kings among mere mortals - these are why we play games



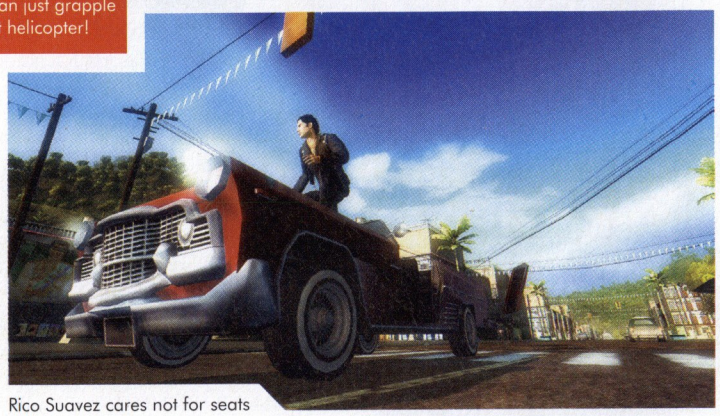


Boatjacking is the crime of the future

Just Cause uses a heat meter much like GTA – but when you piss off the cops enough you can just grapple and steal a combat helicopter!



I can see my house from here

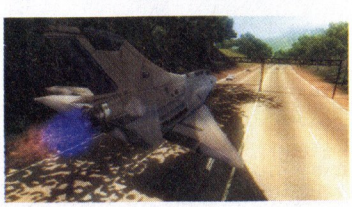


Rico Suavez cares not for seats

Just Cause

DANIEL WILKS throws himself out of a perfectly good helicopter

Every so often a game comes along that prompts us here at the Hyper bunker to come up with a new phrase to describe something. Last time this happened the game we were playing was Dark Watch, and we were marveling at the beautiful simplicity of combining a shotgun with a battleaxe to make one awesome weapon. From that day on we've referred to brilliant weapon design in relation to the shotgun-battleaxe. Now Just Cause has come along and we have another new phrase or more aptly, a new title, "Rico Suavez", referring to any game character who is impossibly suave, preferably Latin American and seems to only do what he does for the women.

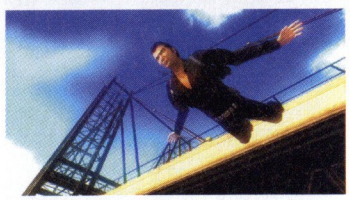


[up] Improper use of aircraft 101

MORE FREEDOM

Rico Rodriguez (Suavez) is a super cool, incredibly skilled South American mercenary bad-arse hired by a secretive government agency to "liberate" the fictional South American country of San Esperito from a corrupt dictator and the evil drug cartel that backs him. To do that you'll be aiding the rebels and slightly less evil drug cartel, and taking control of the islands that make up the massive game area. Aiding the friendly factions basically means killing a lot of people, liberating settlements, stealing drug crops/vehicles/weapons/documents and assassinating important rival faction members in between doing story missions which are by and large the same thing with cutscenes. Performing these missions unlocks more safe houses, more weapons and more vehicles. Inevitably comparisons are going to be made between Just Cause and the GTA franchise due to the freeform structure of the game and the fact that Rico can get in and drive any vehicle in game ranging from a MoPed up to supersonic jet fighters but this isn't particularly fair to either game. Sure, Just Cause may have a similar gameplay approach but it's simply bigger and if anything offers you more freedom.

Some of this extra freedom comes from the sheer size of the game world - 1024 square kilometers. The sheer size makes stealing (or airdropping) vehicles not only a nifty game mechanic but a necessity as getting anywhere in San Esperito would just take too long by foot. The only way to see the sheer enormity of the game world, and it is quite an amazing experience, is to jump in a helicopter and just go straight up. And up, and up, and up. You can't quite exit the atmosphere but you can get far above the clouds, high enough that you can almost see the entire map. And then you can jump. Freefalling from such a height is a wonderful experience; the music switches to a wonderfully ethereal choral piece as you see the ground slowly rise above you and the names of the provinces flash past as you streak over the landscape. Simply falling it takes a few minutes for you to reach ground level. With the chute open it takes forever but you won't care. There's a sense of freedom and scale that will have you hooked. As soon as you hit the ground (popping the parachute at the absolute last moment is a blast) you'll be wanting to do it again. Of course if you're lucky and your aim is good you can transition from falling straight to jacking another vehicle without even needing to use the silk canopy. The size of the play area also makes it perfect for the random hidden



[up] Well, down really

Blue Thunder: THE GAME!

The only way to see the sheer enormity of the game world is to jump in a helicopter and go straight up

package style quest popularised by GTA. There is a hell of a lot of ground on which to hide things and simply navigating the terrain to find them all is a game unto itself.

And then we get to the other point of major difference, or major genius depending on how you look at it; the grapple. Being able to jump out of perfectly good planes and helicopters is good but Just Cause takes the concept of the parachute one step further with the addition of the grapple. A tool aimed and fired like any of the guns in the game, the grapple allows the player to attach a tow line to any vehicle in the game and if it is moving fast enough allow them to parasail behind the vehicle. This easy access to the Y axis may not sound like a big thing but it really offers a freedom of movement that has rarely been matched in gaming. With a little practice players can find themselves parasailing behind vehicles, jacking cars, launching from the stunt position on the roof and starting the cycle over again in one fluid sequence, effortlessly gliding from one vehicle to another. Sure, such a system of movement doesn't need to be used to get anywhere – you can be boring and just drive – but gliding around just feels so damn good.

IS HE TOO SUAVE?

Unfortunately the core of the game, furious gunplay doesn't quite work so well. In keeping with the fast paced nature of the rest of the game, gunplay in Just Cause is simple and intuitive with passive, rather soft aiming and a soft lock on making it rather difficult to miss enemies. For the first few dozen pitched battles this is great fun as you'll begin to see nifty new weapons being unlocked and you'll be getting a handle on movement but after a while they begin to feel a little too easy. A few dozen gunfights might seem like a lot of fun but you can quite reasonable expect to see them in the first two hours of play; over the course of the game you will be involved in hundreds.

Just Cause is a great game, slightly hampered by overly easy combat and a few annoying bugs but it has a sense of scale and freedom that's hard to match and a wild exuberance that is infectious. There's a lot to do, a lot to see and a hell of a lot to pick up or steal, even if it turns out in the end to all be slightly different iterations of the same thing. <<

THE COMPANY **Aside from stealing vehicles, Rico can call in "heavy drops" of vehicles whenever he is on flat ground and not in combat. Initially our suave hero can only call in a dirt bike as a drop but later in the game he can unlock a nifty armed FWD, a stupendously fast, missile shooting jet boat and the most fun vehicle of them all, an Agency Gyrocopter. Who doesn't love a good gyrocopter? Unfortunately there is no option to have a zeppelin dropped but you can't win them all.**

AVAILABLE ON:

360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Avalanche Studios
PUBLISHER: Eidos
PRICE: $79.95 (PC), $109.95 (Xbox 360)
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fantastic freedom, skydiving, the Grapple.

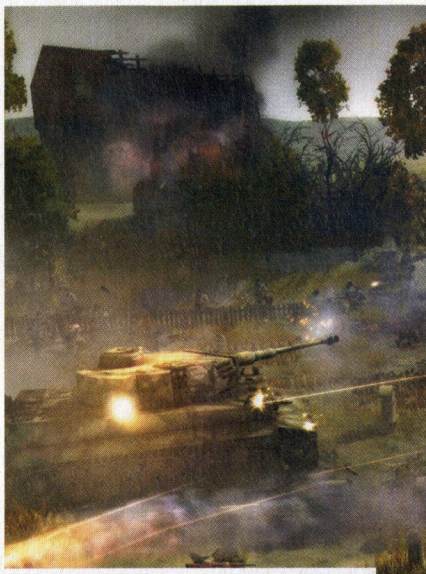
MINUS: Combat a little too easy, samey missions.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	86	91

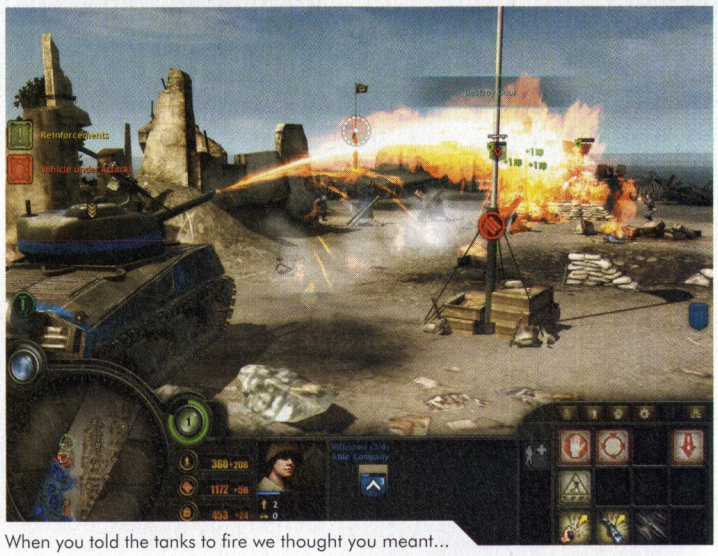
OVERALL

89

Rico may be there for the women but you will be there for the freedom.



Kosta has a number of plans for the movie making app, so we'll keep you informed if there's a Hyper related vid available!

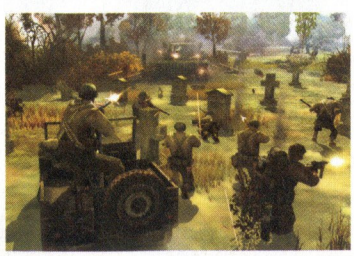


When you told the tanks to fire we thought you meant...

Company of Heroes

KOSTA ANDREADIS, resident RTS nerd reporting for duty sir!

Ever since the real-time strategy genre made the leap from 2D to 3D environments and units, most games in the genre have struggled to utilise the new visual representation to implement new gameplay features and concepts specific to advancements in technology. As long winded as that sentence is, and it is, most games in the genre simply rehash the gameplay of old which to most people out there would sound like a surefire way to boredom. Personally, I have no problem with tried and true strategy games, and if you're a fan of the genre you probably wouldn't either. But, it's certainly refreshing when a title as promising as Company of Heroes turns out to be quite unlike anything the genre has ever seen, a strategy title with gameplay as advanced as the technology behind it. And how!



WORLD WAR 2.0

By now we all know how to build a base, units, select a squad of riflemen, group them via some hotkey action and then command them to attack enemy units. Standard stuff for sure, with the difference this time around being in the execution. Unlike other recent strategy games that have boasted the use of destructible environments, a robust physics engine and units that fire using real line of sight (see: Age of Empires III), Company of Heroes has the gameplay to match the technology. For example, using fence line, debris and vehicles for cover will allow your infantry squads to gain the advantage over their enemy. See a building overlooking a particularly strategic point on the map? Command a machine gunner squad and a sniper to set up shop inside, which will in turn make short work out of any advancing enemy force. Having destructible environments can have both offensive and defensive advantages and with virtually any and every structure in the game being one explosive shell away from rubble, it makes each map and battlefield dynamic in nature - one that can change at any moment, for better or worse. Using the example mentioned above, if enemy troops somehow found a way to destroy the building your machine gunners are holed up in you'd have to rethink your entire defensive strategy. Brilliant stuff.

The AI found in the game is just as impressive, as units automatically take cover and use their immediate surrounding in a natural and realistic way. All this in turn paves the way for experiences both as numerous as they are memorable, and in most cases bordering on the epic. Those who are familiar with developer Relic's last foray into the strategy genre, the wonderful Warhammer themed Dawn of War, will initially find cause for celebration due to some core similarities between the two games. Much like in Dawn of War the resource model in the game is broken into regions and strategic points that players will need to capture in order to secure supplies, recruit new troops or construct new types of buildings. This concept, although carried over has been refined to perfection in Company of Heroes, keeping your troops and frontlines scattered across the map with supply lines and reinforcement strategy playing a large role in all battles – consequently helping the game's World War II setting feel

[up] Vanish now removes Hunters Mark

That'll show the abandoned building who's boss

The soldiers were so desperate they also used the backup Bat-Signal

Virtually every structure in the game is only one explosive shell away from being rubble

that much more authentic. If you were to say, capture an ammunition point on the opposite side of the battlefield from your HQ, you will need to ensure there's a supply line running back to your base or the whole exercise would be pointless.

Company of Heroes may not be the first (or 100th for that matter) strategy game to take place during World War II, but it's certainly the best at capturing and in some cases surpassing the epic intensity and tense situations from even the best films set in the era. The single player campaign follows Allied troops, namely the Airborne squads of Able and Dog Company during the Normandy invasion. It's during the campaign that players will get to witness the amazing detail evident in Relic's 'Essence' engine, which, built on Direct X 10 technology, features visual quality that rivals most current generation shooters. Player models are amazingly detailed, textured, bump mapped and animated using motion capture technology so when the pre-rendered cinematic introduction of your squad storming the beachhead of Normandy blends into real-time footage, the effect is seamless and at times jaw dropping. Company of Heroes is definitely a game that will put your machine through its paces and if you're not on the SLI bandwagon yet, you'll seriously start considering purchasing a couple of GeForce 7900GTX video cards when you're in the midst of the engrossing single player campaign.

SAVING PRIVATE RTS

Much like most action oriented releases in the genre, the population cap in Company of Heroes is kept quite low (comparatively speaking) which puts the entire emphasis not on base and army construction but on the battle tactics and the strategies employed. As such taking Company of Heroes online is more than a treat, it's a necessity, with most battles dynamically evolving along with the scorched and ever changing battlefield. Action packed and adrenaline fuelled encounters are the order for the day and in that sense Company of Heroes is the strategy game that the genre has needed for quite some time, one that utilises its technology to advance the gameplay, both on and offline. And it doesn't stop there, as Relic have seen fit to include a robust map and unit editor as well as a fantastic movie maker mode that will allow any budding filmmaker out there make their very own gritty, World Ward II film in no time. This feature in particular was talked up quite heavily prior to game's release, and rightfully so. There's no doubt many people out there wouldn't put a WWII RTS game on the top of their must-play list, but you'd be a fool to pass on this, the best RTS released in a long while. Put it this way, imagine playing Call of Duty 2 zoomed out with you in control of the entire battlefield whilst retaining the cinematic and action packed nature of the gameplay. But even then, you're still only scratching the surface. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Real Time Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Relic
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Destructible environments, reactive unit and enemy AI, pretty.

MINUS: Either Axis units are too powerful or I suck.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
94	90	93

OVERALL

93

A genre is reborn, Relic have delivered an amazing game.

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Who is driving?

The details in TDU are impressive. Cars indicate, you can drive with windows up or down, and more importantly - in first person cockpit view - you can turn to gaze into the eyes of your appreciative hitch-hiker friend.

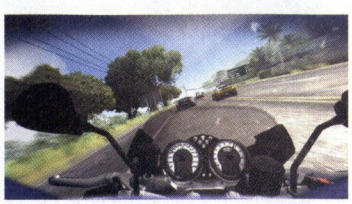
Now there's a grill we actually like

Test Drive Unlimited

MARCH STEPNIK drives around Oahu to pick up the lay-dahys.

Do you remember the original Test Drive? Released twenty years ago on PCs the game's premise and execution was simple: race against the clock and the cops up a narrow mountain road in a luxury vehicle while avoiding Sunday drivers in both directions of traffic. Test Drive was fun to play and groundbreaking for its time, and not surprisingly it took the PC world by storm.

Over the years the Test Drive series has managed to survive in one form or another at the hands of a multitude of developers. There was the Test Drive Le Mans racing game. Test Drive rally racing. Heck, Test Drive even managed a stint as a destruction derby style series of games. Forgetting the question of quality here for the moment (mostly rubbish, it must be said), it's clear that the Test Drive is no stranger to re-invention.



[up] Attempted funny caption

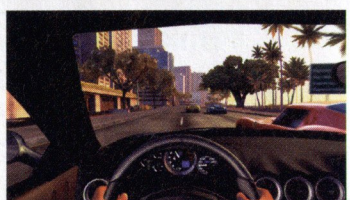
And Test Drive Unlimited is no different in this respect. Labelled a "Massively Open Online Racing" game by its creators, Eden Studios, TDU moves away from simple shtick and the series' identity crises and brings the series back to its roots as a luxury-car driving/racing game. The difference is that this time, it's pretty damn clear that Eden is really onto something. And it all comes down to the two separate 'Massively Open' and 'Online' bits of the whole MOOR tag.

LOST!

Let's look at the 'Massively Open' part first, which really should be further separated into its 'massive' and 'open' constituents for clarity.

Massive, because TDU is set on a virtual re-creation of the Hawaiian island of Oahu – yep, all 1,000+ square kilometres of it. It's huge, and all of it can be traversed by car. All the freeways, alleyways, suburban streets and narrow twisting mountain paths that criss-cross the beautiful island are accessible not only for casual driving on (and you will do this, especially early in your time with TDU – the island is absolutely gorgeous and a joy to explore just for the sake of it), but for the racing and challenge components of the game as well.

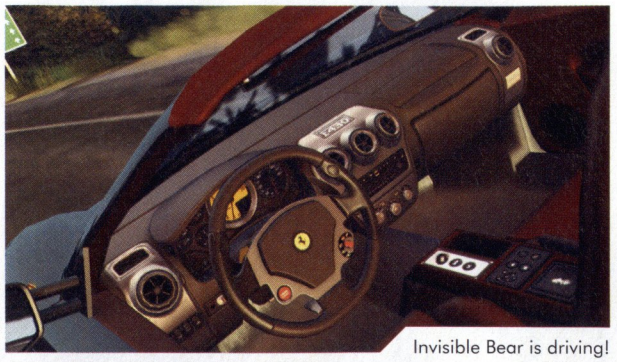
Open, because as far as driving games go, TDU is the closest the luxury real-world racing genre (populated by the likes of Gran Turismo, Project Gotham Racing and Forza) has come to giving gamers the total package. After arriving on the island of Oahu and selecting a hire car to get around in, your first tasks are to find a place to live (read: a place to store new cars that you will soon acquire) and some wheels of your own. This is done by physically driving to an estate agent and the appropriate car showrooms. Once you've taken care of those two basics, it's completely up to you where you go next. You could circumvent the island just to get to know the place; check out some of the more luxury car showrooms in other parts of the island; visit clothing stores to customise your avatar; or get into the meat of TDU – the races and challenges themselves.



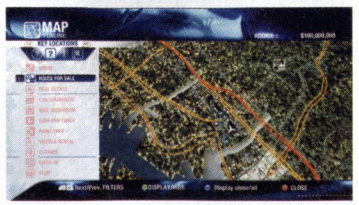
[up] Not pictured - old person driving hat

Challenges and races are a cinch to engage with. Bringing up the main map shows a number of different events you can take part in, while even simply driving around puts you within range of an event in no time. Enter one of these event areas and you'll have the option of launching it. While this system has

On the next Top Gear...



Invisible Bear is driving!



GPS Sounds like you've got to do a lotta driving, right? Well, yes and no. Yes, because to access all parts of the island you have to physically drive there first. No, because once you've been to a location you're able to instantly insert yourself there using the expanded GPS map. And TDU's map system is a work of art - navigating your way around the island of Oahu and finding exactly what you want is a breeze.

TDU is the closest the luxury real-world racing genre has come to giving gamers the total package

been used before (any visions of a character-based GTA-style game world should be quashed right here – this is a racing game, and any human characters in the game are limited to driver models and shop assistants, and the occasional event-based hitch-hiker), in the context of a pure racing game it's clever and works a treat.

The last 'open' aspect of TDU is the ability to create races and challenges for yourself. It's really quite powerful – a whole bunch of parameters can be tweaked (things like traffic density, police presence, etc), including the lay of the race itself, to get things just the way you like them. While this is a cool diversion in single player, it's most valuable in multiplayer where the ability to share your own creations really opens up play.

HIGH BEAMS

Online. The online multiplayer aspect is really what gives Test Drive Unlimited its legs, almost to the point where if you don't have a subscription to Xbox Live, you're not enjoying the full experience. But more on that in a moment.

Just as TDU's gameplay is tightly integrated with the island of Oahu itself, the online/multiplayer portion of TDU is virtually identical to the single player aspect. The online element blends completely into the background of the game with the main noticeable difference being that once you've signed in, some of the traffic (up to eight players at once) on Oahu is actually being driven by a real, 'gamertagged' person. If you wanted to ignore other players you could – it's still possible to simply play through the game earning all your single player rewards while being in the online space.

It's a technical achievement to be sure, and clearly an important focus of TDU. Beyond the expected competitive element online multiplayer brings to the game (including the ability to bet increasing sums on the outcome of a race and comparing your stats), it also adds a purely hobbyist aspect – the ability to tune and mod your car and trade it with others. Without these multiplayer elements, however, single player feels just a little flat.

And that sums up TDU. Without the expanded play offered by online multiplayer, TDU feels lacking. Sure the island is huge and beautiful, and the world is impressively detailed (right down to the dashboards of the many licensed luxury cars in the game). But beauty can only wow for so long - what's left is racing, and TDU here is a mixed bag. On the whole, AI drivers are relatively poor opponents, and the handling straddles simulation and arcade rather uncomfortably (although there are various levels of driving assists for added challenge). Add the fact that on an island full of traffic you can inflict no real damage to your own car (or others), you can't help but feel that the main driving experience is just a little hollow.

Online multiplayer is the essential ticket here. Got Xbox Live yet? <<

AVAILABLE ON:
360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:
- **CATEGORY:** Driving
- **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi
- **DEVELOPER:** Eden Studios
- **PUBLISHER:** Atari
- **PRICE:** $109.95
- **RATING:** G
- **AVAILABLE:** Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Beautiful visuals, impressive detail, open-ended island play.

MINUS: Clumsy AI, no damage modelling, rather flat single player.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	90	79

OVERALL

82

An innovative racer; just make sure you've got Xbox Live access first.

So much for stealth

!!! Even if you're an RTS veteran, play through the tutorial. It really helps.

Obligatory life in Redfern caption

Joint Task Force

DES MCNICHOLAS is in bed with the media

Innovation hasn't exactly been the hallmark of RTS titles over the past few years, with each advance followed by a glut of clones and over-hyped disappointments. HD Interactive's Joint Task Force has encouraged its share of hyperbole, but it does bring a good mix of new and improved elements, supported by a solid interface and a decent stab at realism in contemporary combat environments. With a good storyline, campaigns covering many of the world's major military hotspots, multiplayer for up to eight players and a reasonable tutorial, JTF offers some interesting challenges up front and the chance of some long-term replay value.

DARK SECRETS

Dropped into the role of a battalion commander in the UN-sponsored JTF, players lead the fight against terrorism, fascism, nationalism and anything else that gets in the way of global prosperity. Most missions start with a small force of infantry and light armoured units, augmented as things progress via a nicely designed re-supply and reinforcement system. Logistics play a key role in achieving victory, but players get to focus on tactics rather than chopping down trees or managing production lines. Mission success brings more funding from world governments, which can be used to pay for the delivery of extra resources by helicopter or heavy-lift aircraft. A terrific selection of unit types is available, spanning all types of infantry and a host of real-world aircraft, weapon systems and space technology, and the emphasis on realism is very impressive.

Combat is fast-paced and fun in JTF, thanks to smart AI and an interface that neatly balances hands-on control with automatic behaviour by troops under fire. Officers bring enhanced skills and the ability to call in fire support, and specialist soldiers such as medics, engineers and snipers offer lots of tactical options. Realistic damage modelling prevents mad rushes and encourages players to plan their approach very carefully. JTF puts the media more squarely at the scene of the action than any RTS to date, with journalists all over the place - they are embedded in some missions. Their reports can have a major affect on how much funding is available. As a result, commanders need to very careful about minimising civilian casualties and collateral damage.

JTF looks very nice indeed, with exceptional unit detail and well modelled urban and natural environments. Players will need to zoom out to cover enough ground in most missions, but the odd close-up is worthwhile to track the excellent animations and identify useful cover. Line of Sight is taken very seriously in JTF and almost everything can be damaged or put to use. More terrain is revealed as missions progress and secondary objectives are attempted, with a result somewhere between the traditional fog-of-war and open environments. Joint Task Force brings some fresh air to the RTS genre by balancing the pace and tactical elements everyone looks for with reasonable realism, good visuals and a nod towards the role played by the media on today's battlefields. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Contemporary RTS
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: HD Interactive
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Games
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Slick interface, looks great, excellent reinforcement system.

MINUS: Route restrictions and limited scope to tailor forces before missions.

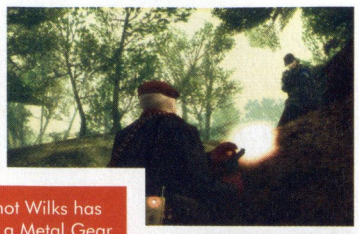
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	80	85

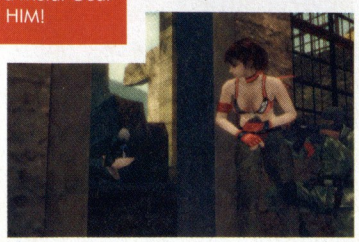
OVERALL

89

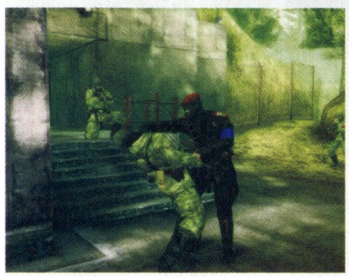
Raises the RTS bar

Smoke 'em if you've got 'em





!!! Believe it or not Wilks has never played a Metal Gear game. BURN HIM!



Snake never really grasped the concept of "urban chic"

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

DANIEL STAINES is a subsistence gamer

There are two kinds of people reading this review: those that have played Metal Gear Solid 3 before and those that haven't. Let's begin with the latter.

The first thing you need to know about MGS3 is that it's the best Metal Gear Solid ever made. It takes place in the thick of the Ukrainian wilderness – a unique backdrop that provides ample opportunity for series creator Kojima to expand upon the stealth gameplay that is the hallmark of the franchise. The addition of mechanics such as the ability to hunt for food and equip camouflage make the world of MGS3 feel robust and dynamic. It's like the environment isn't just something you use to hide from guards – it's a living entity that you need to cooperate with in order to succeed.

Also, the jungle is just a really cool place to set a stealth game. There's something innately awesome about swinging down from a tree-branch onto an oblivious patrolling guard and quickly slitting his throat before he has the chance to cry out. It makes you feel like you're in an action film from the 1980s – the kind where some ultra badarse would go to Vietnam and murder several thousand Viet-Cong before blowing up Russia and riding home in a helicopter piloted by Cindy Crawford. The key difference is that, unlike most 80s action films, the story in MGS3 is actually incredibly well-written and very moving. It's WAY better than the story in MGS2. WAY better.

THE OTHER GUYS

So that's not the newbies dealt with. Now for you other guys – the ones that have already played MGS3 and want to know if it's worth shelling out for the new version. Well... just how much do you love Metal Gear Solid? Are some extra movies, some old games, and an online mode enough to get you excited? Because that's what you'll be getting if you purchase Subsistence. The only change to the core game is that you can move the camera around however you want. That's it. No new camos or guns or whatever. Just the camera.

Of course, the extras ARE pretty good. The original MSX versions of Metal Gear 1 & 2 are fun in a curious kind of way and MGS zealots will definitely appreciate the parody movies available in the "Special Theatre" on Disc 2. You should also get some decent mileage out of Metal Gear Online – provided you can find someone to play it with. There were certainly never any games going when WE tried to test it out. But maybe that'll change once it's available locally. Or at least you'd hope it would.

At any rate, there's no doubt that Subsistence is an excellent package. The only reason you shouldn't buy it is if you already own the original and aren't interested in the extra features. But otherwise – buy it! <<

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

AVAILABLE ON:

360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Tactical Espionage Action
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions
PUBLISHER: Konami
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: October 13

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: One of the best games ever – now with more stuff!

MINUS: Really only for collectors or newbies.

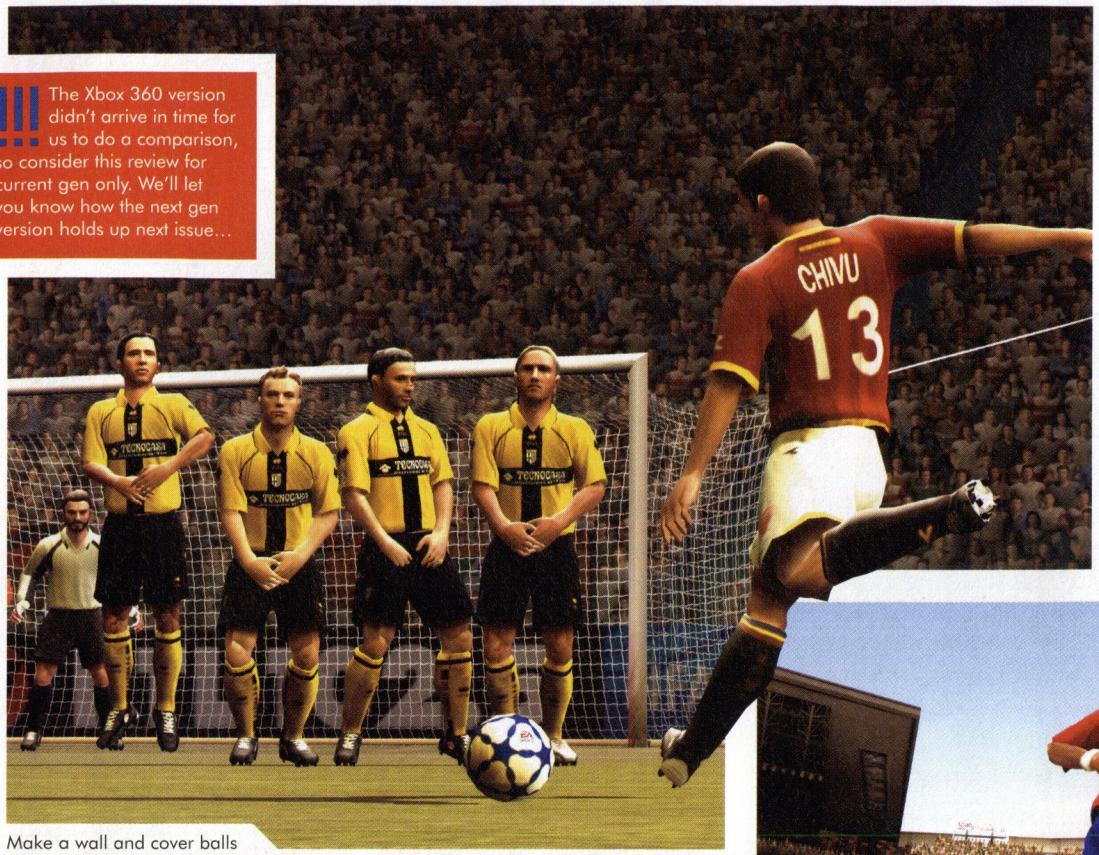
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
95	95	95

OVERALL

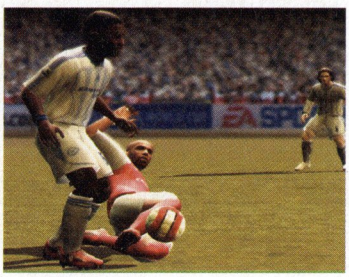
95

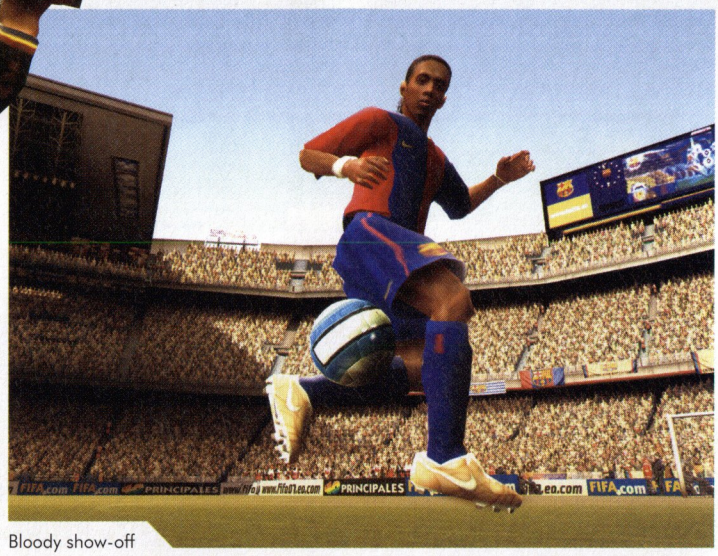
A sublime experience that just keeps getting better.

The Xbox 360 version didn't arrive in time for us to do a comparison, so consider this review for current gen only. We'll let you know how the next gen version holds up next issue...



Make a wall and cover balls





Bloody show-off

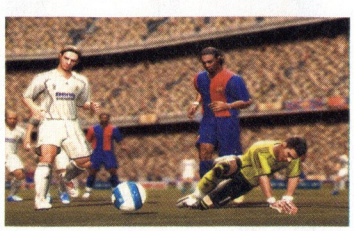
FIFA 07

ELIOT FISH follows the bouncing ball...

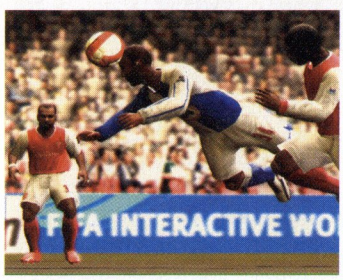
FIFA is different this year. No, really! We may not be talking radical change, but we are at least in the ballpark of a noticeable evolution; not change for the sake of putting some fancy marketing fluff on the back of the box anyhow. To be more specific, FIFA has introduced realistic ball physics in an attempt to inject more of an actual football feel into its style of play. Yay for that.

PINGING IT ABOUT

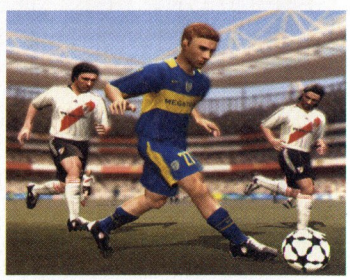
One of the problems with past FIFA games is the way the ball would stick to the players' feet as they performed their animations. Now, the ball actually bobbles, bounces, spins and skids realistically. Or at least, it appears to. There's still a bit of trickery going on – especially with shooting – but this is instantly a much more attractive and playable FIFA.



Repeated sessions, however, do reveal how weak the AI still is. For example: players still tend to mope about the pitch, as if ball watching. The school of fish mentality has almost been eradicated, but general team movement still looks pre-fabricated, as opposed to genuinely reacting to the game. The AI goalkeeper magically delivers his goal kicks to the exact same spot on the pitch every time he boots up field (meaning you use the same central defender to head the ball clear in the same fashion each and every time). And AI throw-ins are almost laughable at times, as you can just position your player in front of the receiver and steal the ball without even trying. Generally, the movement of players on and off the ball is very "samey" every time you play.



[up] Cashley won't be wearing red this year



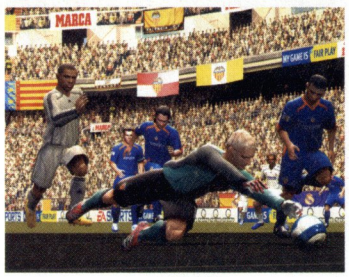
[up] Aren't you in Bully?

It's this tactically repetitive play from the AI that stops FIFA from being the fascinating simulation that Pro Evo manages year-to-year. Realistic ball physics go a long way to helping deliver a dynamic football game, but it's only one foot forward and it feels that the other is still yet to follow. We're still not in true simulation territory yet.

However, this is definitely a much more playable FIFA over past incarnations. The ball physics have definitely helped make the whole passing system feel way more intuitive, with some lovely flicks and one-touches that look great and do what you intend. Stroking the ball around now feels like exactly that. Likewise, crossing the ball seems to be far more exciting, with skilled players really whipping it in with curve and accuracy. Shooting on your wrong foot also makes for some amusingly hopeless attempts on goal.

As you'd expect, this is yet another feature-rich FIFA package and a fun football game between friends. There's no denying that certain elements are top-notch. Some of the player animations for instance, are freakishly accurate to watching the Premier League, whilst even the sound from the crowd is atmospheric and emotive (they even start to cheer successive passes when you're a few goals up at home). There are also specific crowd

Yeah, but can you electrocute Peach?



Jimmy Hopkins in his older years

Reyes? A pre-transfer-window screen then...

It might be obvious to say this, but FIFA 07 is simply moving closer and closer to Pro Evo

chants and songs for your favourite club, which is a really nice touch.

OH WHEN THE SAINTS...

FIFA 07 is brimming with options. There's a set of tricky challenges to accomplish, a tournament mode that lets you play everything from Cup games to season-long leagues (English and Foreign), a comprehensive practise mode that lets you work on set pieces, a great create-a-club and create-a-player mode, and obviously online play.

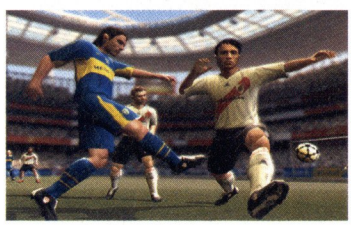
There's also the return of the Manager Mode, which can be played much in the same way as Pro Evo's Master League now. If you don't want to actually play the games, then you can just manage on the sidelines with a text commentary reminiscent of Championship Manager. The depth of the tactics and transfers is poor, but it's still fun to work through a season and try to bag a few new superstar signings for your chosen club.

Another great new feature is the Interactive League. Almost in the way that old "Play for your Club" online Flash game let you volley home goals to push your favourite club up a rankings table, FIFA 07 fans can now help their chosen club dominate an online Premier League, Bundesliga, French league or Mexican first division. When your team plays in real-life, you play the corresponding fixture in the game against a rival player and your results contribute to how your club fares in the online table.

Online Everywhere also means that FIFA 07 can deliver you ticker news of real breaking headlines and scores, as well us update the in-game roster, for the ultimate convergence of your virtual and real-life football obsession.

Visually, the current-gen FIFAs (PS2, Xbox) are adequate, but they lack the crispness, colour and frame rate that you would expect. At times, FIFA looks grimy or grainy, and the odd lighting on the players still makes them all look like they have bald spots – like you've got eleven Zidanes on the pitch. Stylistically, the players still look pretty ugly, with a real mixed bag of likenesses. Only the top clubs have players that look accurate, whilst the rest of us have to put up with weird zombies.

It might be obvious to say this, but FIFA 07 is simply moving closer and closer to Pro Evo. It seems if you can't beat them, join them. First they switched to the PES control scheme, and now we're seeing simulated ball physics, stylistically similar set pieces, and controls such as the finesse shot. The problem for FIFA is that it's now caught in an uncomfortable place between arcade and simulation. It now needs to either become a better sim than Pro Evo, or offer a very different, compelling alternative – and at the moment, it's not doing either. <<



AVAILABLE ON:

360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC / PS2 / Xbox / GCN**

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
PRICE: $79.95 (PC), $89.95 (PS2, Xbox)
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Bag loads of options and play modes, online and off.

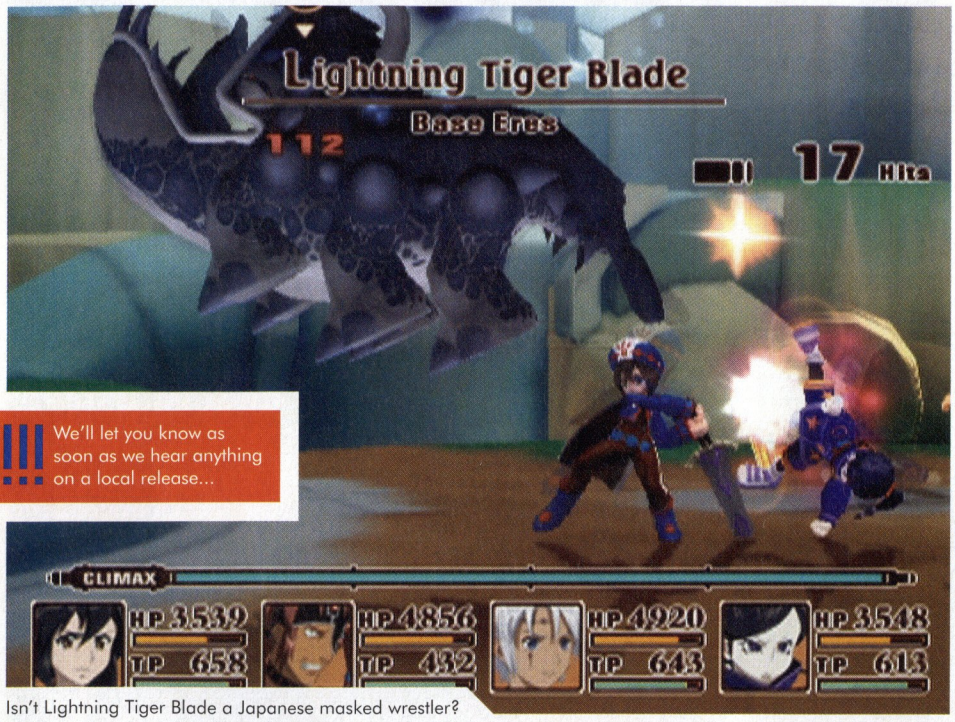
MINUS: Weak, repetitive AI and predictable player movement.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	88	78

OVERALL

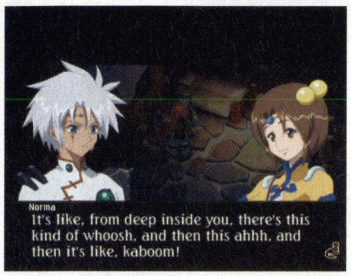
80

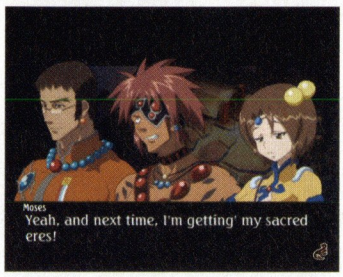
Plenty of fun features, but it's still not king.

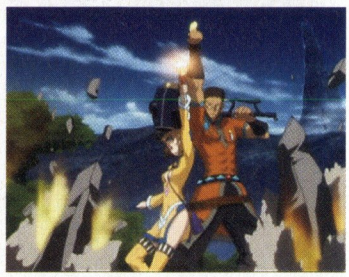


Isn't Lightning Tiger Blade a Japanese masked wrestler?

!!! We'll let you know as soon as we hear anything on a local release...







Tales of Legendia [IMPORT REVIEW]

SALLY WOELLNER lets her credit card do the walking

In many ways, it's difficult to know what to say about Tales of Legendia. Set aboard the Legacy, a ship the size of a continent, it follows young marine Senel and his (of course) requisite cast of friends pursuing (again?) the kidnappers of his sister, a young woman with (sigh) mysterious powers. Despite the standard RPG storyline, some individuality shines through, aided by beautiful visuals and the charm and personality the Tales series is known for. Yet there are enough flaws entwined with the charm that in the end, you're left feeling more indifferent than you should.

SMUGGLER'S COVE

Most of the elements of the game end up being double-edged swords. Take the visuals: the environments are really lovely, seemingly softly painted on-screen, showcasing the individual design and personality of each location with luminous colours. But the camera is constantly fixed at almost the same distance and angle, so you're squinting at super-deformed people who bear a mostly symbolic resemblance to their anime portraits. Plus, due to the camera distance, the characters perform every action in a comically over-emphasised manner, mugging like inexperienced mimes.

It's unfortunate, as the characters are well written, and the voice acting is mostly enjoyable. You'll spend a huge proportion of the game in dialogue or cutscenes - they don't always go on for long, but they're sprinkled throughout every location, to the point where you feel as though half the game time is spent listening to dialogue.

This isn't bad, as the writing's witty and fun, though the plot is standard Tales fare - you spend a lot of time pursuing various kindnappers. The best elements of the story take a while to get to, kicking into gear about two thirds of the way into the main storyline. It makes some sense when you find out that the main storyline is only half of the game - there are individual quest storylines for everyone in your party, doubling your play time as you solve mysteries left around after the main epic concludes. But still, there's a fair bit too much dawdling before you get to the heart of the story.

The battle system is another mixed blessing. It's one of the Tales series' most interesting elements, resembling a 2D fighting game, stringing together combos and performing a variety of customisable moves. You can control any of the characters in your party, with a competent AI taking care of everyone else. So it's sad that you can get through most of the game using button-mashing alone. In some cases, it's necessary - battles are full of beautiful, complex spell effects... which obscure your view of the action, leaving you button-pressing madly in the hopes that you're hitting *something*. The strategic combinations of spells and moves are really gratifying when you pull them off, but the game doesn't force you to use them all the time to survive.

Tales of Legendia is a fun, cute, and entertaining RPG, but its flaws drag it uncomfortably close to the mediocre. If you like a solid and pretty RPG with simple puzzles and plenty of button-mashing monsters in the face, it's worth it - just don't expect the best of the Tales series. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:
- **CATEGORY:** RPG
- **PLAYERS:** 1
- **DEVELOPER:** Namco
- **PUBLISHER:** Namco
- **PRICE:** TBC
- **RATING:** TBC
- **AVAILABLE:** Now (on import)

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Pretty, fun battle mechanics.

MINUS: Numerous flaws and button-mashing.

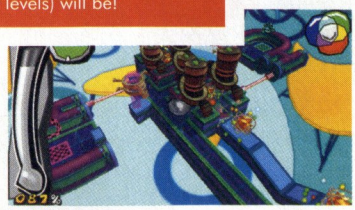
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81	80	70

OVERALL

77

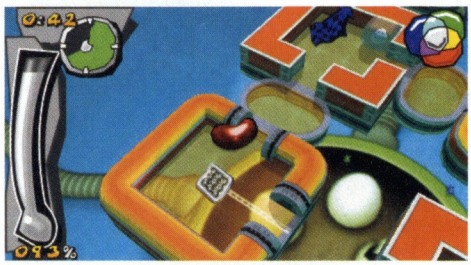
A solid RPG, but we were hoping for more from this entry in the series...

Check out the *www.yourpsp.com* website in the future cos that's where the downloadable content (probably new levels) will be!



Mercury vapor will poison your brain

Genius blob physics



Mercury Meltdown

DANIEL WILKS needs to get himself together

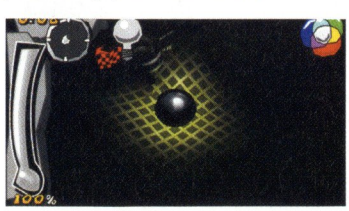
The first Mercury game was a great idea hampered by some incredible frustration and a linear framework that meant if you got stumped on a level you had the joy of bashing your head against a wall until either it or your skull caved in. Unless you were an absolute master at maneuvering a small blob of liquid around a track and solving puzzles at a breakneck pace it was more than likely that it would be your skull that went first, either that or your PSP would be flying out the window.

STEADY PACE

Mercury Meltdown is more than just a cash-in sequel with a whole new graphical style. The first and most notable difference with the single player game is that the linear progression is basically a thing of the past. If you get stumped on a level you can just choose to go to a new one as the system of unlocking new content through grabbing specials on the way through a level (or just completing levels) keeps the flow of new levels coming at a steady pace. Instead of dividing levels into Race (getting through a level fast), Percentage (having a certain amount of mercury left at the end of a level to continue) and Task (opening doors or changing colours to get through a level), the majority of levels in Mercury Meltdown combine aspects of all three for a fuller, more complex but ultimately more rewarding gameplay experience. Completing individual components of the levels (Race, Percentage, Task) rewards you separately so you can always come back later for completion's sake. There are around 160 levels to the game so that's a hell of a lot that you'll need to do to get the ball rolling (worst pun ever).

Another significant improvement is the camera, something that was so evil it all but tried to kill your dog in the first game. Players can rotate the camera left and right with the circle and square buttons, up and down with the triangle and x buttons and can zoom in and out with the triggers. Even handier is the ability to pause the game and enter a free look mode in which you can scope out the entirety of the level and get a handle on the tasks that lay ahead. This user friendliness travels over into the HUD – the top right hand side shows a colour wheel that comes in very handy with the frequent colour puzzles that require you to split your blob into two or more parts, colour said parts individually and then recombine them to make a new colour. Although we have not really been able to test them as yet, some of the unlockable content includes party games such as races and a game which requires players to paint levels. Ignition/Awesome also promise some form of downloadable content in the future, although at this stage we're not quite sure what form it will take.

Although it's not the best action/puzzle game on the PSP, Mercury Meltdown is definitely a big step above its well intentioned but unnecessarily frustrating predecessor.



AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / DS / GBA

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Awesome Studios
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Heaps of levels, non-linear progression, new camera.
MINUS: Hard.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	75	83

OVERALL

83

The best game about blobs of liquid metal on the market

Hmm... to a mystery dungeon perhaps?

Pokemon Mystery Dungeon

Once again coming in two flavours – Red Rescue Team and Blue Rescue Team, Nintendo have shifted things up somewhat for this release, bringing the former to GBA and the latter to DS. This duality is more than evident in the design of the game – DS owners should go in fully prepared to play a game that looks like and feels it was made for GBA, cos that's what you'll get. Long suffering Pokemon fans who have been clamouring for a Pokemon handheld game that isn't just a rehash of what's come before – your wishes have been answered. But is that a good thing? In this case, not really.

This time around you actually play as a Pokemon. Well, you're a human who inexplicably becomes a Pokemon. You don't get to choose either, instead going through a series of questions to determine which Pokemon you're most like. After fielding toughies like "Do you get the feeling that you've slowed down lately?", I was told I was the quirky type, an eccentric who does things at his own pace, who is carefree but somewhat childish, and who sometimes upsets people because of his fickle nature. It's like looking into a window on my soul! After being assigned as a Meowth and choosing my rescue team partner, the game proper could begin.

Forget collect 'em all, and think rescue 'em all. You and your buddy take on jobs from distressed Pokemon who're trapped or have lost their way out in the wilderness. To get to them, you'll have to make your way through multi-level dungeons which are randomly generated each time you enter. Battles are kind of turn based but you don't enter a battle screen, instead approaching an enemy then choosing attacks/items from a drop down menu, or using button combinations to execute previously specified attacks.

It's an interesting idea, and there's still a collection element in building up your rescue team and levelling up, but the execution is clumsy. The menu system is really convoluted, the touch screen controls feel completely tacked on (because they are), the combat itself doesn't have much rhythm or appeal, the random dungeons make every level feel the same, and well, this game just doesn't have much of a hook.

CAM SHEA

AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / **DS / GBA**

DETAILS:
- **CATEGORY:** RPG
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- **DEVELOPER:** Chunsoft
- **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo
- **PRICE:** $69.95
- **RATING:** G
- **AVAILABLE:** Now

HYPER VERDICT:
- **PLUS:** Gets less confusing with time, can rescue friends wirelessly.
- **MINUS:** Messy game and interface design.

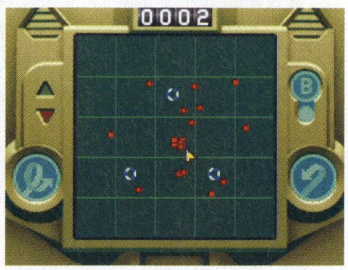
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
60	65	70

OVERALL

71

Gotta save 'em all! Kinda.

Zeppelin or Sandworm?



Star Fox Command

It's funny. When you first get your paws on Star Fox Command, the use of the stylus for control feels liberating. Suddenly you're sliding the tip over the screen, turning and diving as you move it. It all feels so compelling, but you know what? At the end of the day we'd prefer to just use the damn D-pad. You may feel differently, but for us not only does it get uncomfortable using the stylus, but you're covering up part of the screen with your fingers – the part of the screen that displays the oh so important top down map of the battlefield – and you're forced to tap off to the side of the screen to execute U-turns and loop the loops, or tap and drag bombs onto the map, taking you out of the control scheme. Other manoeuvres are integrated into the controls, so sliding the stylus left and right lets you roll, while double tapping the screen is a boost. It all sounds well and good, but we can't help but think that by using the D-pad you'd have tighter control and easier access to all those moves via buttons.

Star Fox Command makes other valiant but flawed attempts to shake up the formula, chiefly in the mission structure. Now you have a top down tactical map of the area and a limited number of turns to achieve your goal. Say you have to kill a certain number of enemies. You'll have to play through the mission several times to work out where the enemy squadrons will come from, as well as where the valuable goodies are on the map, because you can't see everything. There's fog of war. Oh yes, and to dissipate this fog you must use the stylus to rub it off. Problem is that you can only rub off so much per turn and then it just grows back for the next turn. While we like the turn-based idea and the fact that you can only draw in a path of a certain distance for your fighters to travel per turn, the fog of war and the fact that you have to go through a trial and error process to beat each mission (which in itself is comprised of a series of battles) gets old fast. It also doesn't help that the environments are barren, lifeless and small, and yet enemy fighters are still hard to see. Star Fox Command certainly isn't bad, but we're hard pressed to recommend it.

JOEY TEKKEN

AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / **DS** / GBA

DETAILS:
- **CATEGORY:** Shooter
- **PLAYERS:** 1-6
- **DEVELOPER:** Q-Games
- **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo
- **PRICE:** $69.95
- **RATING:** G
- **AVAILABLE:** Now

HYPER VERDICT:
- **PLUS:** Can be compelling at times.
- **MINUS:** Fog of war, hard to make things out, frustrating.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
69	67	74

OVERALL

73

Nice idea, clumsy controls

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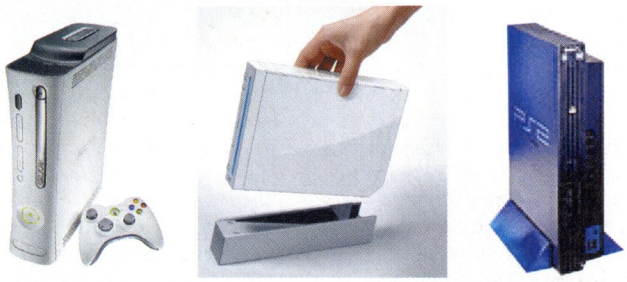

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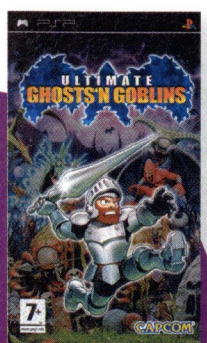

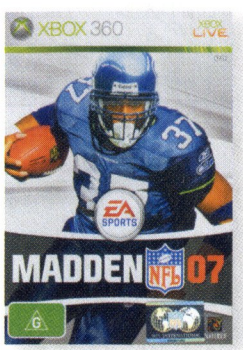

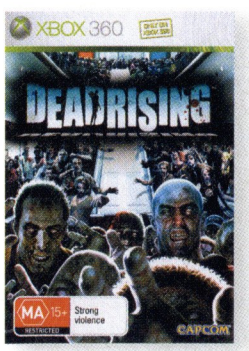

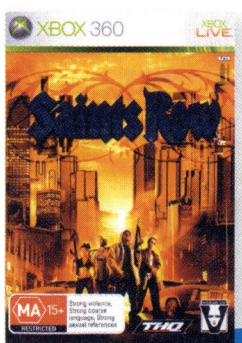

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Suikoden V

Basically put, Suikoden V is the best Suikoden game since the second in the series and is good enough to make up for a lot of the flaws that have sullied the Suikoden brand in the last few iterations of the game. As a matter of fact it's one of the best traditional Japanese RPGs on the market at the moment, combining a sweeping story, great characters and a great combat system that goes back to the glory days of being able to recruit up to five other characters into your party. There are a lot of characters you can recruit too – 108 from all walks of life ranging from carpenters to conductors (the musical kind, not the bus kind) – if you have the patience to seek them out and answer their questions properly.

Players take the role of the unnamed Prince of Falena whose mother, Queen Arshtat has become more and more erratic and violent since taking up the Sun Rune (a powerful magical artifact) to defend the kingdom from invaders. The story is excellent and quickly reveals that the first impression you have of a character may not always be the right one, leaving the unwinding plot to have a great deal of depth and opportunity for intrigue and backstabbing.

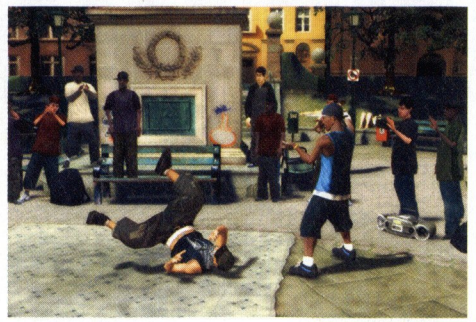
Unfortunately for all the good in Suikoden V there are a few problems that really drag it down. The game suffers from random battles in a big way – it seems as though you can't walk six paces outside a town without being attacked by something. Fights are usually quite brief affairs but there are still far too many of them. Loading screens show a similar problem – even though individually they're quite short, the sheer weight of numbers makes them rather frustrating.

DANIEL WILKS

AVAILABLE ON:
Xbox 360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: Konami / **PUBLISHER:** Konami
PRICE: $69.95 / **RATING:** PG / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
88	84	87	85



B-Boy

And here we were hoping B-Boy would be You Got Served: The Game. Although B-Boy tries to be all edgy and street, when push comes to shove it comes across as more of a somewhat clumsy Tony Hawk clone than a real dancing game. Players take the role of an up and coming B-Boy (or B-Girl) learning the ropes and how to survive in the tough concrete jungle in which everyone has a stupid name and may bust a move at you any moment. Through a series of dance challenges, competitions and battles the player amasses more moves to add to their repertoire.

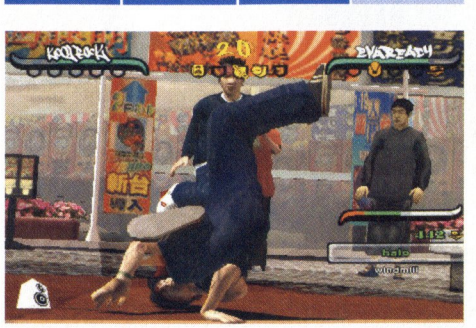
The basic mechanics revolve around stringing together dance moves that transition into each other while keeping on the beat and not repeating yourself. Unfortunately this is easier said than done as many moves only have limited transitions until you have performed them enough times to raise their rank (from one to five stars). Special moves such as balances and spins require skill tests which usually involve either keeping a balance meter steady a-la Tony Hawk or hitting a power meter at the right time. Keeping time is another element of difficulty; the player has a spinning disc that revolves around their feet showing beat markers. Supposedly hitting a move on the beat marker in theory should increase your score and get you closer to a medal but in practice the beat markers are a little out of synch with both the music and button presses making it difficult to judge when to actually pull off a transition. To make matters worse a number of moves require the player to tap the shoulder buttons in time with the beat marker to keep them going. Still, it does have a pretty good soundtrack.

DIRK WATCH

AVAILABLE ON:
Xbox 360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / Xbox / GCN / **PSP** / DS / GBA

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Dancing / **PLAYERS:** 1-2
DEVELOPER: FreeStyleGames / **PUBLISHER:** Sony
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** TBC / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
82	90	70	67



Metal Slug Anthology

What else is there to say about Metal Slug Anthology aside from the fact that it brings six slices of side scrolling cartoonish gun violence to the PSP in all their arcade glory? The anthology contains Metal Slugs 1 through 5 as well as the rebellious, non-numeric (unless you skip a few iterations and use roman numerals) Metal Slug X. If you're a virgin to the series, shame on you. You've missed an arcade classic. All of the games are essentially the same with a few different weapons or different looking enemies to differentiate them but the Metal Slug series is a fine example of not needing to fix what ain't broken.

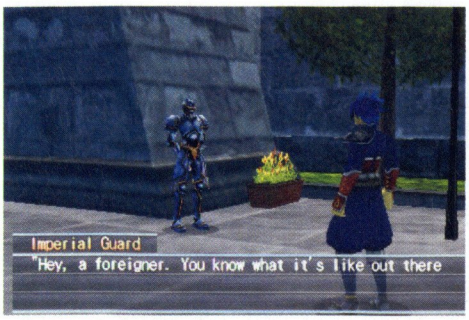
Choose from one of four characters (only cosmetic differences apply) and shoot your way through side scrolling levels murdering an untold number of enemies rescuing numerous hairy POWs who hide weapons or fruit in their boxer shorts and occasionally jumping into vehicles to do pretty much the same thing but faster and with larger bullets. While the gameplay is simple and the difficulty is the opposite, Metal Slug is an absorbing and mighty fun franchise. Thankfully (or unfortunately if you're super-hardcore), each of the games in Metal Slug Anthology features unlimited replays so frustration doesn't have to kick in too badly. You just need to keep an eye on yourself; if you get a little too zealous with continues you can finish the individual games in about an hour each. The arcade presentation looks great on the small, crisp PSP screen (and the backgrounds and animations still more than hold their own to this day) but unless you want to stretch the game out of its original aspect ratio you'll have to put up with letterboxing on either side of the screen.

DIRK WATCH

AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / DS / GBA

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Side Scrolling Shooter / **PLAYERS:** 1-2
DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore / **PUBLISHER:** SNK Playmore
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** TBA / **AVAILABLE:** October 31

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	75	86	84



Blade Dancer:
LINEAGE OF LIGHT

The only thing that really sets Blade Dancer apart from any other handheld RPG is the fact that it has a crafting system that is integral to gameplay and also easy to use. Players take the role of Lance, a young and cocky swordsman who travels to the mysterious island of Foo looking for fame, adventure and all that other RPG stuff. Of course he has a grand destiny too. Natch.

Gameplay revolves around following simple side quests and the occasional story mission, fighting a number of battles, picking up junk and crafting new items. Combat is a mixture of real time and turn based with action menus similar to most turn based RPGs but with the added element of the fight clock not stopping when you go to choose an action for the round making combat a somewhat more interesting yet less tactically advanced affair. The most interesting aspect of fighting is that special abilities use a resource called Luna which is collected by damaging the opponent. What makes this system interesting is that both the player and the enemy use the same Luna pool so using special abilities is always a question of whether to use smaller special abilities to limit the number of abilities the opponent has access to or to save up for one devastating attack and hope that the enemy doesn't use the Luna first.

The crafting system can be used to make nearly all of the items found in game, including weapons. Appraisers (found in towns) can break down items into their core ingredients teaching the player how to make them. This comes in especially handy with weapons as they have only limited durability and you don't want to be caught in the middle of a fight without one.

DANIEL WILKS

AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / DS / GBA

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: Hit Maker / **PUBLISHER:** NIS America
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** TBC / **AVAILABLE:** October 31

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
75	77	71	68

Power Stone Collection

Coming back to Power Stone again after a couple of years away from the series, we've been gratified to find it's just as much fun as we remember. This game was a hit in the office when it first came out for several very good reasons. Firstly, it was one of the first fighting games to do 3D movement and environmental interaction properly. Secondly, it had charming design and characters. Thirdly, this was a game that was immediately accessible and anyone could jump into and have fun with. And finally, Power Stone was a killer multiplayer game. In fact, that's what it's really all about – squaring off against a friend, flinging boxes at them, chasing after the three power stones (getting them all transformed you into a super character for a short period), using awesome weapon drops, climbing or twirling around poles and launching feet first at your opponent, lightly leap frogging a barrel sending it flying back at your friend. Damn it's good fun – simple, but with just enough variables to make it endlessly entertaining.

Power Stone 2 upped the ante with larger, more adventurous level designs that can take you through multiple sections, and support for four players. It lost some of the original game's simplicity, with more confusion in seeing what's going on, but hey – four players! With this release you can even play four player multiplayer using the game share function with just the one UMD!

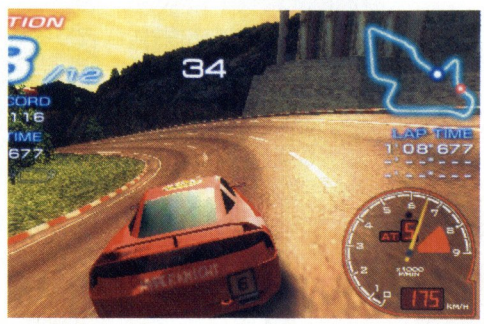
So, two games for the price of one. Not bad eh? They're pretty damn good ports too, in true 16:9, although some of the environmental textures in Power Stone 2 are pretty average. Even so, there's so much right about Power Stone Collection that you'd be crazy not to check it out.

FRANK DAY

AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / DS / GBA

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Fighting / **PLAYERS:** 1-4
DEVELOPER: Capcom / **PUBLISHER:** Capcom
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** TBC / **AVAILABLE:** October 15

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	79	87	85



Ridge Racer 2

Ridge Racer on PSP still remains the best arcade racing title on the system, which is partly a comment on just how good it is, and partly a reflection of how few great PSP games there actually are. No matter, because Namco are back with a sequel. It's not really what we were expecting.

At first glance you could be forgiven for thinking that Namco had simply repackaged the original game for this release – all the courses from the original are present and accounted for, as is all the music, and there have been zero modifications to the engine. Where the original Ridge Racer was a loving compilation of courses from Ridge Racer past, repackaged with killer drift mechanics and a graphical overhaul, Ridge Racer 2 is simply an extension of that concept, packing even more courses from the earlier games onto the UMD. As such it feels a bit like a semi-sequel.

For gamers who don't own the original, this is clearly a must-buy, and represents the most comprehensive Ridge Racer experience there is. For those of us, however, who raced thousands of kilometres in the original Career mode and must now start again, well, it's bittersweet. There are roughly twice as many courses so that's a big plus, and there are two more music "discs" – Remix 2 and Classic 3. If this was the content on the original release we'd be jumping up and down, but we can't help but think that we're getting a soft option sequel, and that maybe Namco should invest the time into creating an all new Ridge Racer for PSP, not just building on the foundations of the original. It's still a fantastic game, but if you own the original you may want to think twice about laying out the dosh.

CAM SHEA

AVAILABLE ON:
PSP / DS / GBA

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Arcade Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-8
DEVELOPER: Namco / **PUBLISHER:** Namco
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** October 19

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
89	91	90	91

Tracksuit sold separately

NAMCO

TIME CRISIS 4

>> TIM LEVY

"When you hold your gun on its side, it decreases your accuracy by 30%, but increases your coolness factor by 25%" - **Giorgio Bruno**

"You are such a fashion victim Giorgio" - **Evan Bernard**

Apart from the graphics getting better over the past 10 years, the most immediately noticeable thing about TC4 is that the VSSE agents are becoming sooo trendy. The new VSSE agents, Giorgio Bruno (Italy) and Evan Bernard (France), now look as if they would be more at home on a metrosexual experimental fashion runway in Milan than gunning down waves of colour coded henchmen ("ohhh - those terrorists are such fashion failures Evan - they deserve to die.")

THE SAVE THE WORLD STORY

Whilst on a weapons smuggling investigation under the guise of shopping for duty free hair products in JFK airport California, you are suddenly attacked (your cover is blown by an inside agent) by an army of jump suited 'terrorists'. After destroying most of the airport, thus skillfully rendering most duty free goods 'damaged stock' ("we'll come back later Giorgio"), your mission takes you via helicopter through the city, with an ensuing brilliant air battle (using machine cannons ala Sega's 1995 Gunblade), to intercept a weapons truck. Using a sniper rifle (nee scope mini-scene) to take out the truck's tires sets you up for a ground battle with the game's first real 'boss' - Marcus Black. After dispatching Marcus, you notice that all the 'terrorists' are wearing US Army dog tags... ("No Evan, dog tags went out as a fashion accessory years ago - they are REAL dog tags... meh! No Evan, they aren't dogs disguised as people - you blondes are sooo stupid... humph")

I could go on about how you travel to Wyoming and battle it out in the forest and caves and then onto an air force base in Colorado (what is it with shooters and airbases anyway?), but the cool thing is that you get to battle it out with Wild Dog, who is the only character to make it through the whole TC series. After 10 years, and numerous bouts in hidden hospitals, with about 14 kilograms of lead removed from his body, he isn't as fast on his feet any more, but his totally rad ("now THAT'S a fashion accessory Evan") weapons arm is now sporting a grappling hook, a mini gattling gun and a tractor beam.

The new introduction to the series is that there are now multi-screen mini-stages where you are required to turn to the left or right by pointing the gun off screen in the required direction. It may take several goes to master fast turning and it really could have been better implemented, but nonetheless these stages make you sweat as you defend yourself for 30 seconds.

In other mini-stages, you are attacked by the insectoid 'bio-weapons' called Terrorbites. Basically mimicking small beetles, wasps and large praying mantis', they attack in waves and are best defended by choosing the appropriate weapon, being either the machine gun, shot gun or grenade launcher.

While the stages will take you through an array of interesting shootout scenarios, the boss stages are very cool. Fortunately/unfortunately, U.S military captain William Rush joins you and lives up to his surname by always rushing in front of you, which is good, except he often seems to get in the way of your bullets as well, with his most memorable 'funniest home video' moment being him swinging upside down in a rope trap so you have to time your shots and not hit him.

Fans of the franchise won't feel let down by this latest effort. You can usually get through the first of 3 stages on one credit, but it's not the money that is the real investment in this game. To complete the game, it can take about 45 minutes, with no foreseeable option to skip to latter stages. So make an effort and bring along $14 bucks and a friend who is a good shot and you'll find yourself in one of the best interactive B-Grade action movies around. You might even pick up some fashion tips along the way. <<

9/10

One of these things is not like the other

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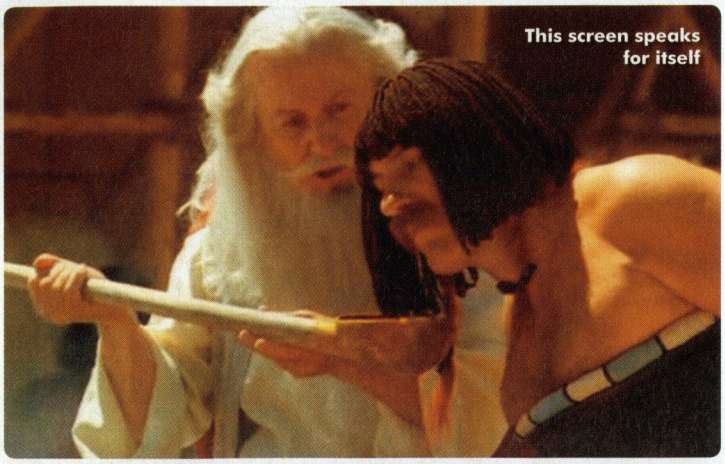
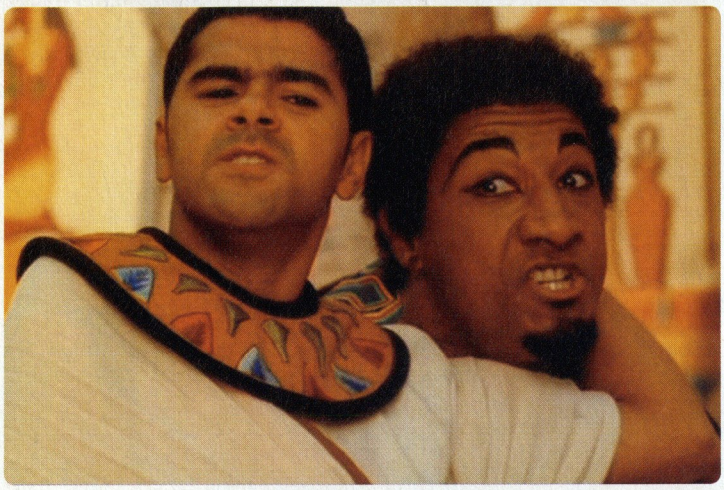

This screen speaks for itself



Asterix and Obelix: MISSION CLEOPATRA

MADMAN, PG

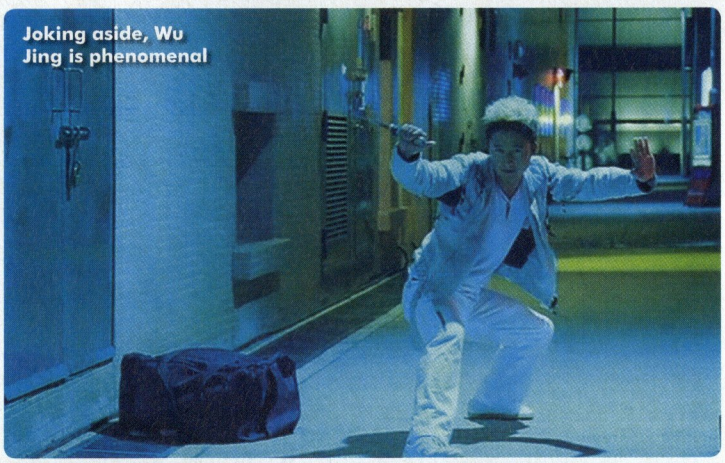
» Veering wildly between painfully funny and just plain painful, faithfully emulating the approach of the comic in throwing 100 jokes at you a minute and hoping that at least half of them give you a chuckle. About half of the jokes do hit their mark so if you're willing to cringe a little and put your adult mind on hold for 90 odd minutes, Asterix and Obelix: Mission Cleopatra is a very fun little movie.

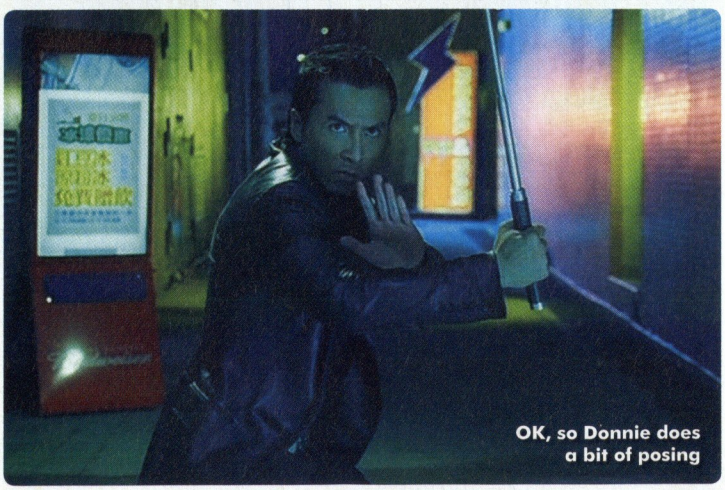
The plot of the film sees a hapless young architect from Egypt, Edifis, given the mission by Cleopatra to build a palace in three months to impress Julius Caesar so he will proclaim the Egyptian people the greatest in the world. Knowing he can't possibly achieve the Herculean task without help, Edifis travels to Gaul to enlist the aid of the brother of his friend's father, Getafix and his strength potion. Asterix and Obelix come along for the ride. Cue many silly names (Artifis, Sourpus, Cellularis, Cellulitis, Antivirus Tinitus, etc), a lot of plays on words (which often fall a bit flat with the translation from French to English) and a whole heap of vaguely linked scenarios ripe for jokes.

Whilst the film certainly looks childish it's not really a kids movie; sure there are a number of slapstick moments but many of the jokes are quite sexual in nature (though still remarkably chaste), there are a huge number of pop-culture references and Cleopatra's outfits are about as revealing as you can get them without any actual nudity. Monica Bellucci makes a rather gorgeous Cleopatra but the real comedic stars are Christian Clavier (best known as the disgusting servant Jacquouille in The Visitors opposite Jean Reno) as Asterix and Gerard Depardieu in a fine fat suit as Obelix. The disc contains both the English and French versions of the film.

Daniel Wilks

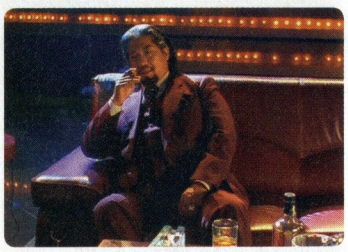
FILM: 7 / FEATURES: 4


Joking aside, Wu Jing is phenomenal


OK, so Donnie does a bit of posing

SPL

EASTERN EYE, MA 15+



» In a rare villainous turn, long standing martial arts star Sammo Hung plays an evil and remarkably intimidating crime boss, Wong Po in SPL (Sha Po Lang, three stars in Chinese astrology that denote a negative outcome). On the eve of putting his nemesis behind bars, dedicated cop Detective Chan (Simon Yam phoning in another great performance) not only has his star witnesses assassinated in front of him, he becomes the adopted father of their young daughter and discovers that he has an inoperable brain tumour. Instead of letting something like a fatal disease get him down, Chan instead uses the tumour as kind of a count down on how much time he has left to capture Wong Po. Becoming desperate, Chan and his task force become increasingly corrupt, trying to frame Wong Po for a murder they know he didn't commit. Enter Ma Kwan (Donnie Yen in fine form and actually acting for a change instead of simply posing), the last honest cop who will take over the task force when Chan retires/dies. The first half of the film plays as a dark police procedural, setting up the characters and their eventual, inevitable clash. Almost Elizabethan in its tragedy, the second act sees all of the characters getting what is coming to them, whether they deserve it or not.

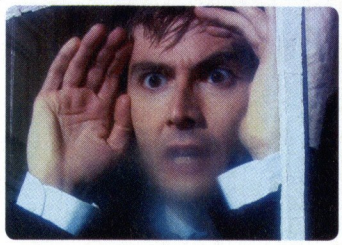
Although there are only really three fight scenes in the movie, the choreography by Donnie Yen is incredible. It's brutal, spectacular without being ballet and believable. Sammo Hung, although he is getting on in years and looks larger than ever, is incredible as Wong Po. He's a pissed off mountain capable of amazing speed and precision. Wu Jing as Wong Po's number one henchman and assassin is also outstanding – he may only have a handful of lines to deliver but his physical presence and prowess is amazing.

Daniel Wilks

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: 6

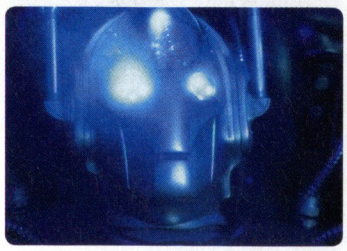
Dr Who SEASON 2

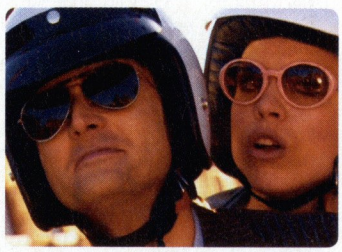
ROADSHOW, PG



You'd walk stiffly too in that metal g-string

The genius of Dr Who is the series' incredible ability to reinvent itself. Throughout the series (including the original run), the character of Dr Who has not only changed in look with the different actors but in personality as well. This change in personality is most noticeable with the new series. Christopher Eccleston in series 1 played the Doctor as something of a frustrated yet benevolent god, simultaneously hating and pitying his human charges, hating their stupidity and short-sightedness whilst seeing their potential. David Tennant, the Doctor in season 2 is almost the exact opposite, loving humans for their impetuousness and folly but he also has his very dark side. Tennant's Doctor, in his own words, has had his mercy exhausted. Instead of a friendly traveller, Tennant is an avenger, willing to fight to the death against anything that harms his charges. He gives no second chances or ground. It's a great character basis for the strong second series which sees a reinvention of the Cybermen, a battle against clockwork Renaissance robots, the evil of television and even a showdown with the devil next to a black hole.

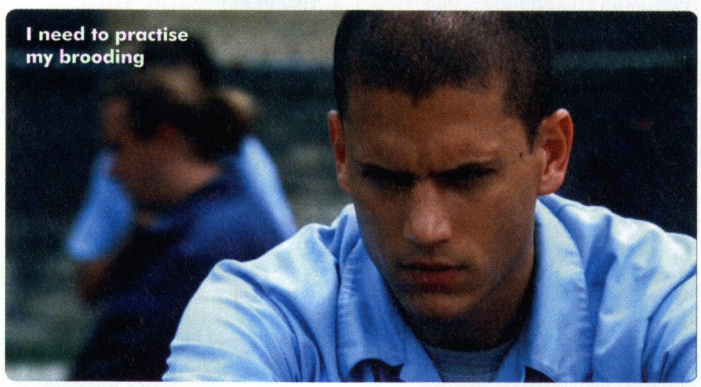




It's a little strange seeing Dr Who with somewhat decent special effects and locations that vary more than a quarry during the day and a quarry during the night but fans of the original series should be impressed all the same. It's a great show still capable of wonderful stories and clever characters. Hopefully the next season will continue along in the same vein. While we've reviewed season 2 as a whole, you can't buy the season as a box set yet – it's been released as individual volumes.

Daniel Wilks

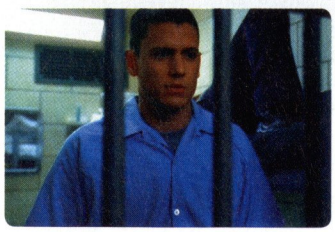
FILM: 8 / FEATURES: N/A



I need to practise my brooding

Prison Break

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M



You need to suspend your rational mind a little to enjoy Prison Break as the main character Michael Schofield's plan to break his brother out of prison requires so many variables to fall into place that to think of it as too hard not only makes your brain hurt but makes the show a little too hard to swallow. If you can accept some of the leaps in logic, however, Prison Break is a fast paced and enthralling slice of TV thriller.

Convinced that his brother, Lincoln (Link the Sink) Burrows is innocent of the crime of murdering the vice president's brother, Michael Schofield concocts a plan to break his brother out of a maximum security prison before he is executed for his crime. This plan involves getting himself arrested (a task achieved by robbing a bank) but not before all of his plans, as well as the blue prints of the prison are tattooed on his body in a seemingly random pattern that only he can decipher. It's a brilliant premise and one that leads to some tense and clever plot twists. Much like Lost, the joy of Prison Break is slowly working out exactly what is going on. You know Schofield is breaking out of prison but exactly how all of his plans start to come together is a work of genius, as long as you can swallow the rather loose premise to begin with.

Daniel Wilks

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: 7

Battlestar Galactica SEASON 2

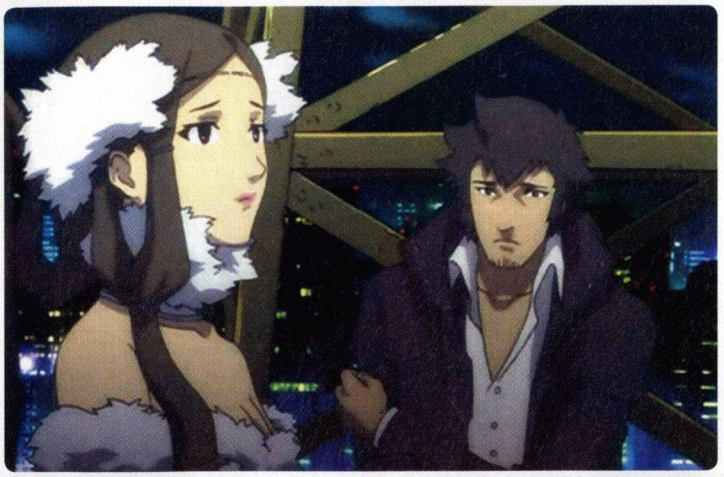
UNIVERSAL, M15+

When Season 2 of Battlestar Galactica reaches its conclusion, with one of the most dramatic turns in recent TV history, you'll definitely be left scratching your head and not without a sense of awe. At this point, this newly revised Battlestar Galactica sheds all relation to its somewhat cheesy 70s roots and stands as one the best dramatic and action TV shows currently broadcasting. Forget about the 'science fiction' tag, this makes other shows in the genre pale in comparison, namely Star Trek and that show from the Buffy guy, Firecracker or something. As Season 2 continues mankind's struggle to escape extinction from the Cylons, the overall pace of the show picks up quite considerably as well as its confidence in dealing with darker themes and more intricate character arcs than those seen in the first season. Much as before, the show juggles various unusual (for TV) themes such as identity, religion, and existence with the rawer and more familiar themes of friendship, love and revenge. It's quite a potent mix and makes for some great TV, but beneath its exterior lays some great dialogue on current world events as the show seamlessly goes from space dog fighting to unflinching looks at war, and brutal behaviour when living in a state of fear. Battlestar Galactica IS as good as this review makes it out to be and when you get to the simply amazing final episode, you'll see that it's also one of the gutsiest shows out there. Can't wait to see where it goes from here.

Kosta Andreadis

FILM: 9 / FEATURES: 6

Don't fart in a space suit



Speed Grapher VOLUME 1

ANIMATION STUDIO: **GONZO**
GENRE: **PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTION**

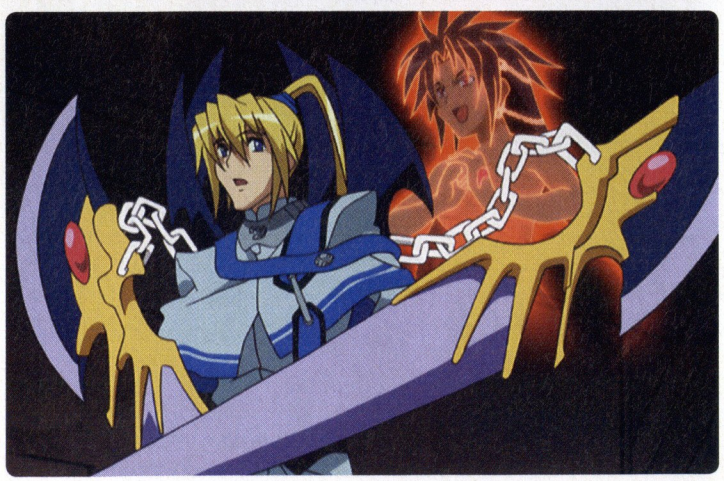
» Power and money corrupt, and this is one of the central themes of Speed Grapher; only taken to an incredible extreme. It's set in a Tokyo run by a depraved ultra elite, where any fantasy, no matter how sick, can be realised for a price. Speed Grapher doesn't pull any punches in its confronting approach to action and human degeneracy. Even its hero, the celebrated war photographer Tatsumi Saiga, gets physically aroused by taking snaps of death and mayhem. Of course, next to everyone else he looks like Mary Poppins.

The story revolves around the Roppongi Club, an ultra underground organisation that runs the city, holding ritualistic meetings filled with orgies and sacrifices. Acolytes can earn the chance to be blessed by the 'Goddess', teenage girl Kagura, who has the power to make them 'Euphorias' – essentially taking their innermost desires and making them real. When his cover is blown while attempting to infiltrate the club, Saiga becomes one, and gains an incredible power – the ability to utterly destroy anything he photographs with his camera. Kagura, meanwhile, is an unwitting pawn in the club's affairs, and despite being the daughter of the most powerful woman in the city, is starved and a prisoner in her own home. Saiga is soon on a mission to rescue her and to uncover the secrets of the club, and is not only going up against the richest and most powerful citizens of Tokyo, but also against a cavalcade of bizarre characters and Euphorias.

The story is twisted and interesting, and is a great set up for the wildly imaginative enemies. During the first volume you'll meet a cop who can only get off when she's wielding her guns, an insane dancer assassin who is part Mister Fantastic, part gimp, and able to wrap his limbs around an opponent's head and pop it off like a champagne cork, and a piano teacher who has thousands of rotting arms in storage, trying to replace those of his dead daughter. And these guys aren't even the major players. Definitely worth checking out.

Dirk Watch

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 7
OVERALL: 8



Elemental Gelade: REACT (VOL 1)

ANIMATION STUDIO: **XEBEC**
GENRE: **ADVENTURE**

» "Gardia, a world where the people explore the far reaches of the sky. Where mysterious powers can be found floating amongst the clouds. Where a legend holds the promise: in the heavens, where the clouds lead, lies a land of gold. This is the story of Cou, a young sky pirate, and the adventures he experiences in his pursuit of love and freedom."

Wow, could that intro spiel be any tackier? Probably not, and it's not really accurate either. It should probably be something more along the lines of "Gardia, a world where 80s punk rejects wear arm warmers. Where mysterious powers are always fully explained. Where the designers, animators and scriptwriters fail to fulfil the promise, of a unique anime series that isn't just a retread of those that have come before. This is the story of Cou, a generic and headstrong young boy with few discernable skills, who is paired up with an utterly characterless girl named Ren who joins with him to become the ultimate weapon, all while fumbling around misunderstandings and bad dialogue."

Elemental Gelade is certainly not terrible, but it's hardly inspired either. Cou abandons the life of a sky pirate when he pledges to protect Ren – a member of the Edel Raid race, and capable of bonding with one human, with which she can "React", becoming a powerful weapon. The duo set out to reach Edel Garden, a famed place which may or may not exist, along the way meeting other Edel Raids, being besieged by Sting Raids (an artifical form of Edel Raid), being tracked by a mysterious organisation, and of course, gaining a support party of colourful and powerful characters, who probably have their own motives. It's heavy handed, badly scripted and after the initial couple of episodes looks to settle into a pretty generic pattern. While you'll get a couple of laughs along the way, with so much great anime out there, we're not sure why you'd bother with this.

Dirk Watch

ANIMATION: 5 / STORY: 5
OVERALL: 5

WinWinWin

Win JUST CAUSE for Xbox 360!

There's impossibly cool, and then there's Rico Suavez. This is a man, after all, who thinks nothing of diving from a fighter jet into a freefall, then gliding between the rotating blades of a helicopter, before using the chopper to liberate a small village, AND seducing every woman within a five kilometer radius merely by clenching his butt cheeks. You know what they say, Suavez by name, suave by nature.

Simply put, Just Cause puts the freewheeling fun back into open world gaming. Rico is a "wouldn't it be cool if" character – you're constantly leaping from vehicle to vehicle, grappling helicopters, parasailing to destinations and shooting the crap out of the most gorgeous tropical archipelago since Far Cry. It's great fun, and thanks to our friends at Atari, we have six copies of Just Cause to give away on Xbox 360.

To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

What is the lead character's real name in Just Cause?

Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Cause I Want It, 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 X-MEN: THE LAST STAND on DVD!

The last in the X-Men trilogy, X-Men: The Last Stand charts what is perhaps the final great battle between the forces of the titular heroes and Magneto's growing band of disaffected mutants. A scientist, the father of a mutant himself, has discovered a "cure" for the mutant gene, causing both widespread hope and panic amongst mutant-kind with one side believing it may allow them to lead a normal life and the other fearing that the normal human populace may use the cure as a weapon and forcibly remove their powers.

Now that The Last Stand is making its way to DVD – in a special 2-disc set loaded with extras, we've teamed up with Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment to give away 10 prize packs. Each pack contains a copy of the film on DVD, an X-Men t-shirt and an X-Men mouse pad.

To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

Who directed X-Men: The Last Stand?

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

Terms & Conditions: 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am September 26 and entries close at 6pm November 15. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am November 16 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 January issue of Hyper on sale December 6. 9) 6 winners will each receive one copy of Just Cause for Xbox 360 (RRP $109.95). 10 winners will each receive X-Men: The Last Stand on DVD (RRP $34.95), an X-Men t-shirt (RRP $30) and an X-Men mouse mat (RRP $15). Total value of the competition is $1459.20. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

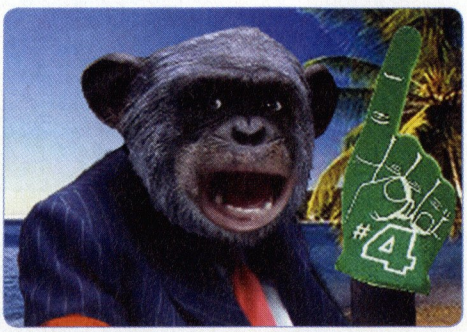
LINKS

Translated from Aramaic by **Kosta Andreadis**

Georgey Boy Likes to Fiddle

- ***www.starwars.com/episode-iv/release/video/f20060825/index.html***

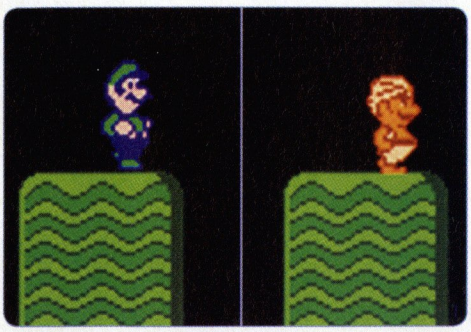
With the original, untouched versions of the Star Wars Trilogy hitting DVD - fanboys, nerds, geeks and other such losers are sitting cross-legged covering up their hard-ons in anticipation. "Han shoots first!" Guess what? He doesn't. The special edition versions of Star Wars are the true versions, where technology finally caught up to Mr. Lucas' grand vision. With technology (finally!) up to his level of genius, it allowed him to add a Mos Eisley entry sequence where a large CG robot hits a smaller CG robot, a cute little animated sequence that was sitting in his brain for over 20 years! Phew! You know what would happen if technology caught up to my vision? You guessed it, a Star Wars orgy. And yes, Han shoots first.



Monkey Magic

- ***www.careerbuilder.com/monk-e-mail/***

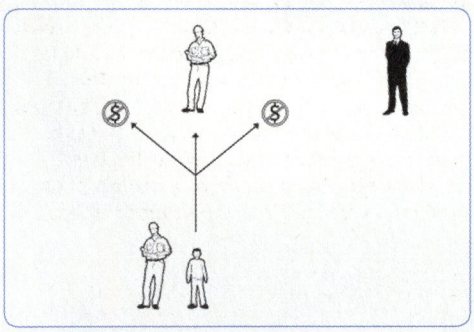
The whole email system is so 1990s - been there, done that my man. It needs to catch up to where we're at now, the 22nd or what some people refer to as, the 21st century. Yes, I believe our calendars are wrong by about a hundred years, long story I'll fill you in later. Anyway back to the email thing, about it being out of date and all. It needs something that screams "hey look at me, I'm totally hot and trendy" like monkeys reading out mail that would have been boring otherwise. Back to the calendar thing and why it's actually the 22nd century. The short version is this – paper, patience, a long ass time ago, strawberries, ass, glue and sideburns that talk.



Super Doobie Bros 2

- ***nintendo.about.com/library/ mariochanges/blmariodifferences1.htm***

Cam: "Remember how on the NES, Super Mario Bros 2 was like so weird and unlike the rest of the games?"
Wilks: "Man, Miyamoto must have been on crack or something, because that game was like totally tripped out, what with all the weird jumping and picking vegetables from the ground and hurling them at enemies and stuff."
Cam: "Apparently it wasn't even a Mario game after all! Apparently it was some weirdo Japanese game about a Persian prince called Doki Doki something"
Wilks: "Man, what a trip. Stop hogging the dutch and pass it over."
Kosta (walking in): "Hey guys! Damn, it smells like fried ass in here!"



Crazy Science Guys Think They Know It All

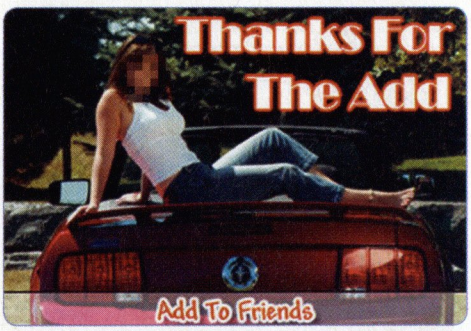
- ***www.tenthdimension.com/flash2.php***

All this jumbo about strings vibrating and atoms farting electrons is nothing but pure mumbo! The one true theory is actually one that I devised and it's pretty simple really – it involves this huge 'creative' guy and his son who had a successful career in carpentry. Any ideas, or was I too subtle? Yep, I'm talking about Hoopman and Son's Wardrobe Emporium! In an easy to find highway location, Hoopman and Sons' have all your wardrobe-y needs and can answer any question you may have. Be it about quantum mechanics and the dynamic nature of the sub atomic world or simply about how many coats of lacquer do we put on our chest of drawers. The answer is 41! Open 7 days a week.

Kirk Cameron Knows It All

- ***www.wayofthemaster.com/***
- ***www.fazed.org/video/?id=409***

Looking at the URL you'd probably be thinking that this is the homepage of some new Van Damme movie where he fights bad guys and then does the splits for some reason. Apparently it's some sort of religious cult thingy that Mike Seaver started when Growing Pains finished and he ran out of money. If you look closely you'll find the scariest website in the world, one that provides a vision of a world filled with American accents so thick they make Texas look like Paris, France. Scary stuff for sure, but the more I hear about this 'God' fellow the more I like him, after all he did make the banana so it will fit into your mouth perfectly – which will come in handy if you ever go to prison.



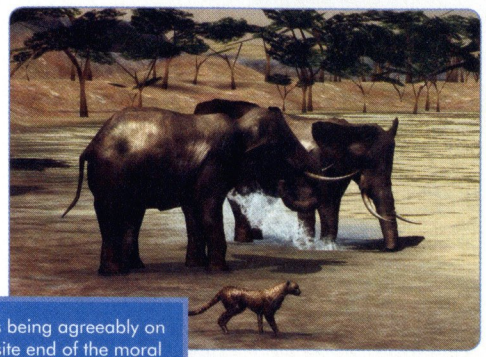
RANT #236 - A Waste of Space or "Thanxx 4 Da Add!21!!!"

- ***www.myspace.com***

In theory it sounds like a great idea, but in execution there's nothing else in this world that is as vapid, useless and boring as My Space. It's been around for a while and it seems everyone in the free world has their very own 'my space' where they can create or join little communities, blog, chat and so forth. It's the web site equivalent of a teenage chat room, or a long and pointless MSN chat filled with emoticons of cute animals dancing and overuse of the word "LOLZ!!" The internet was sold as this huge information database that will raise the collective intelligence of whoever used it – ha! My Space is a sign of the apocalypse and not one of those cool ones with flaming horses ridden by 13th century Swedish royalty.

WILD EARTH: Photo Safari

Tim Henderson once photographed elephant dung



[above] The definition of both ambition and greed

It's a little sad to think that Wild Earth: Photo Safari is probably going to become the domain of people who don't usually play games. Self-proclaimed 'hardcore' gamers will likely contemplate the notion of an educational game with a focus on photographing Africa for about half a second, scoff, and then go back to anticipating Crysis. There's a very simple reason why this is sad, and that's because Wild Earth is actually an amazing experience that anyone who considers themselves a gamer should take a serious look at.

CIRCLE OF LIFE

Causing no confusion in regard to its gameplay focus, Wild Earth throws players into the shoes of a photo journalist who is visiting Africa with a writer and a knowledgeable professor whose slightly annoying voices provide banter that is informative in terms of both game progress and basic education. They are never visually present, however, so there's still an atmospheric edge that comes from the sense of being alone in the wilderness.

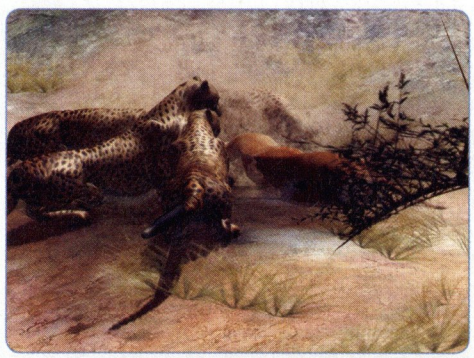
Not at all surprisingly, the game plays a lot like a first person shooter, with the notable difference that you're armed with a camera rather than any kind of firearm. There is no jump command, and there are some bizarre invisible walls, but the focus on observation rather than survival keeps this from being a proper hindrance. It's always possible to get the photo you need, as well as any secondary shots, and in general the camera really works to enforce a sense of observation and gradual immersion. Since you're always looking through the lens you can zoom in and out at will, which combines remarkably well with the relaxed pace to make this virtual Africa a place you can appreciate at your leisure.

It also helps that Wild Earth is no visual slouch. Areas are a bit barren and trees often lack any sense of unique growth, but leaves and grass sway gently, and the overall standard of texturing is very high. Water effects seem inconsistent, and can look different depending on the angle you view them, but the animals themselves are an absolute wonder to behold. More than just detailed high-poly models, the populaces of Wild Earth appear as though they're actually composed of skin and fur stretched out over flesh and blood, and they animate beautifully as a result.

> As well as being agreeably on the opposite end of the moral spectrum, Wild Earth also just happens to be a bazillion times better than every hunting game ever made put together. Is anyone at all surprised by this? We thought not.

Should you go too far astray in your search you will be gently pointed in the direction you need to travel to attain the next shot crucial to the article, although in general following certain animals will get you from one event to the next and there's no rush. At times you will switch from moving on foot to traveling in a helicopter or jeep. Strangely, you have to drive the jeep and take photos at the same time, but the air ride is on rails and follows a strictly linear path while giving greater cinematic photo opportunities.

Just to cap everything off, at the end of each stage the option is given of reading the article you've just taken the photographs for. This becomes surprisingly enjoyable in itself, but that could be said about the entire game. It may be marketable as edutainment, but Wild Earth is a top title for what it is. Our only complaint of significance is that it's all over a bit too soon. <<



Look at all that valuable ivory going to waste

AVAILABLE ON:

360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / Xbox / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Photography Sim / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: Super X Studios
PRICE: TBC
RATING: N/A / **AVAILABLE:** November

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Perfect pacing, strong visuals, likable music.

MINUS: A little short.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
86	85	85	86

You owe it to yourself to give this a fair go

The WOW Chronicles

DING SIXTY MOTHER&*(#ERS!!

ELBASTARDO

It's been months coming. Endless and alluring. I've watched other sixties on Epic An'Qiraj mounts, dressed up in Tier 3 Raiding armour with envious eyes. I've seen these fabulous beasts in PVP areas chopping down reckless and foolish enemies with gay abandon. I've teamed up with them in Dungeons, had them aid me in Quests like they were supermen and now, oh happy day, I am one! ElBastardo, the sixty Paladin. And it's! It's!...

Nothing.

Nothing happens. Not really. No nice little message or extra doomsday powers. It's not like you except a cutscene or a goddamned telegraph from the queen, but still... Oh, you get access to a whole bunch of training, sure. You get a few new Quests for the Endgame areas but that's it. Your XP bar, the thirsting master which you have served mindlessly, feeding with murdered monsters, handed in quests, gone. It feels like being Bruce Wayne and having your parents murdered in the alleyway. Suddenly, everything is different, there are no easy goals and if you're going to play with the big boys, you've got to grow up very quickly indeed.

But here's the thing: you can't really do much on your own as a sixty. Grinding for gold gets really old really quickly, especially when you've killed every sort of creature in Christendom a hundred times over. There are whole areas that are too hard to enter alone because at sixty, everything is geared for higher levels working together. And pick up groups. My god. If you've gotten to sixty without a guild or at least some mates you can call on, basically, you're a psychotic, a prick, or a ninja and you should not be played with. A sixty Looking For Group is like a giant retard in overalls in a primary school playground, giving out cake and licking his wet lips.

Normally, I'd be safe from this kind of indignity but my glorious Guild, Horizon, has about twenty sixties who play full time anyway. I mean, these cats are always on. I recently took a week off, only to discover that another prominent Raiding Guild had dissolved and we'd picked up thirty or so new sixties, meaning that they're always in Upper Blackrock Spire or Molten Core or some damn thing. There's no time for me, who still needs to finish up in Blackrock Depths, let alone Scholomance, Stratholme or Dire Maul. And the way endgame is weighted, you really do need to run those Dungeons before you go into the really high level Instances because you need good gear to survive them. It's a dreadful catch 22 situation and for some reason, fifty of my Guild mates refuse to drop what they are doing and serve my needs completely. Bastards. Bastards!

Also, the game mechanics of Warcraft do not provide very well for support classes. If you can't dish out damage, or heal it effectively, endgame sees you twiddling your thumbs and doing things you're not that great at. I have a level sixty support character. The tumbleweeds roll.

So what to do, what to do? Well, I'll report in now and again with how Elbastardo is doing but also, prepare to meet Grinning, currently a level 8 undead mage.

[above] You got a real purty mouth

[above] A dragon in a dungeon. Where have I heard that before?

Next month – *Glass cannons, mages and dying. Also, perhaps, an endgame raid. If they let me.*

HYPER Game Retailer Listing

	STORE NAME	LOCATION	PLATFORMS SOLD
	Berlin Wall Software Supermarket www.berlinwall.com.au	408 King William St, Adelaide SA. Ph: 08 8231 4799	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA, Mac,
	bGamer www.bgamer.com.au	Online Retailer	PS2, PSP, MP3 Players
	Burn Direct www.burn.com.au	Online Retailer	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA
	Devoted DVD www.devoted.com.au	Shop 5, Rovergom Village, South Marrang VIC. Ph: 03 9436 4566	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA
	Dick Smith Electronics / Dick Smith Powerhouse www.dse.com.au	http://dse.findnearest.com.au/	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA.
	DVD Crave www.dvdcrave.com.au	Shop 1/471 Payneham Road, Felixstow SA. Ph: 08 8365 5231	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA,
	DVD Orchard www.dvdorchard.com.au	Online Retailer	PS2, PSP, Xbox, GameCube, PC, GBA
	EB Games no website	Please go to your nearest EB Games store	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA
	GameFuse www.gamefuse.com.au	Online Retailer - PH: 03 9681 8189	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA, Mac,
	Game Traders www.gametraders.com.au	Please go to your nearest Game Traders store	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA,
	Gamehead www.gamehead.com.au	Online Retailer Ph: 1800 008 525	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA,
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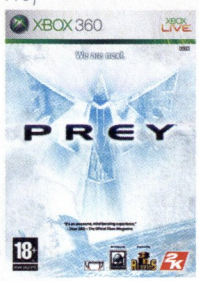
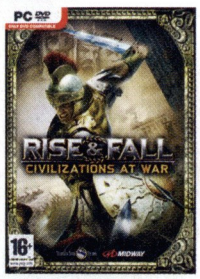
	The Gamesmen www.gamesmen.com.au	Penshurst 02 9580 9888; Penrith 02 4721 7411; Wollongong 02 4225 2424	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA,
	Toys `R' Us www.toysrus.com.au	Stores all across Australia	PS2, PC, PSP, GBA, Xbox, Xbox 360, Gameboy Micro, GBA
	True Gamer www.truegamer.com.au	Online Retailer	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube,GBA.

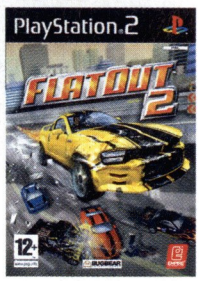
XBOX 360
Prey



PC
Rise & Fall



PLAYSTATION 2
FlatOut 2



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GENCON 20

Christian Read gets his Spider-Man costume out of the closet and flies to the States to be with his people...

It is Friday, the 11th of August and I am in Indianapolis at GenCon, the largest role-playing, war gaming, card trading, nerd-baiting event in the world and I cannot get inside. My press agent is missing, no one knows who I am and it is thirty degrees before nine in the morning. I long for my own death. How did it come to this?

HYPER'S GO TO GEEK

My name is Christian Read and whenever something nerdy and involving men dressed up like goddamned blacksmiths and wenches who substitute belly for cleavage are involved, the Dread Editors of Hyper have started sending me.

I have come to GenCon to cover the launch of Dreamblade, a game from Wizards of the Coast but have also been sent upon another mission. "Poke around, see what you can find and most importantly, cover the Costume Ball." That all seems simple but apparently, forces ranging from the meteorological to geopolitical have gathered to make that harder than it should be.

Four hours into my thirteen hour trip to San Francisco, reports indicate Adolph Hitler and his new boyfriend, Godzilla, have made a terrorist attack on the world. I emerge from a plane, with seven hours worth of flying to go, to discover enormous lines, security guards barking orders and dire threats if I take water, or my vital beauty products, onto the plane. American customs has never been something to take lightly but when its Terror Alert: Red, frankly, it's just mental. Finally, after hours of late planes and endless queues, I arrive in Indianapolis and a rather swank hotel room. With five hours sleep out of thirty, I must go into the Heart of Geeky Darkness.

It takes under an hour before I see a Klingon.

I can feel that this will end very badly for me. My press agent is held up and I must find my own pass. Finally getting to the liaison, who is late, I discover that no one has seen fit to register my presence. Which means running around in a slight panic realising that of the thirty thousand people who are present... not a good goddamned one of them knows who in the hell I am. Thankfully, I am both a coward and desperate and after an hour or so, I finally manage to get in by a mixture of pleading, firm handshakes and being very polite indeed.

OH THE HUMANITY!

Within... wonderland! If you're of the nerdy persuasion.

Towers made of trading cards, toys, acres of swords, knives and Gandalf staffs for sale. Most frightening, what seemed to me to be a life sized Spiderman fist statue holding a Spiderman themed katana in a brutally suggestive manner. Endless screens showing off new gaming products and threatening wax statues of warrior men who seem to me to be offering their services as special 'Warrior King, handy with his Fists, available for special appointments with gentlemen with no shame or girlfriend.' It doesn't

[Top] Hexagonal nerd joy
[Middle] A pirate game - disappointingly chocolate free

[Below] It appears their heads have been possessed by Hentai demons!

06

[Up] Get your Spidey Senses Tingling with the new Lady Spidey! [Left] Cthulhu always needed more bling

take long to finally locate a Wizard rep and the gentlemanly Toby hooks me up with one of the Dreamblade designers. First interview done for the day, I wander the cavernous halls. Before eleven o'clock, there are some fifteen thousand people playing board and card games. A pavilion set up for Yu-Gi-Oh, where children under ten and men over forty line up to play a champion fills up an hour before the 'master' arrives. A sight to chill a man. Not so much, however, as the terrifying image of GIANT BISECTED BATMAN. The enormous fibreglass statue of Batman, looking as if he had been enlarged to fight some sort of giant monkey, seems to have been neatly severed, cut down by precision lasers. Everyone else thinks it is 'cool' but I am saddened their callous indifference to the Caped Crusader's brutal death and so I move on and catch the Bad A$$ Girl Gamers Panel.

After hours of being surrounded by hefty chaps in T-shirts with dragons/ programming jokes/ Monty Python quotes, I'll admit I might not have had the purist of motives in mind when selecting this event. However, the ladies of Team Iuz (www.teamiuz.com), put on a great show. Charming, funny and whipcrack smart and effortlessly, authoritively geeky, they discuss the myths and hardships of being female gamers with great style. Of course, the fact that they were total honeys didn't hurt...

Those first hours pass in a haze. I remember a man dressed up as a golden armoured pleasure-toy, a man so fat he couldn't get on a Segway scooter and some frightening old chap, dressed up like a wizard, asking if people would like to take his photo, touching scared children too eagerly. I watch with no small amusement as tempers flare over a game of Risk and it is like being in a Red Dwarf sketch bought to life before me. None of this, of course, would have prepared me for the Costume Ball... but that's a tale for next issue. For now, it was time to get stuck into the new game from Wizards of the Coast that was the purpose of my trip – Dreamblade.

[Below] Meetings with Captain Fistula may cause monsterism

DREAMBLADE

The two contestants stare down at the board, barely noticing each other. They do not speak, they barely move, instead they stare in concentration at the monsters, freaks and angels they will battle with. Then the referees start the game. The Dreamblade 20K Release Tournament is on and this is the final. Sam Black is 25, Robert Hatch 26 and they're deadly grim about this. 436 players, 19 hours of continuous game play and it's come to this point. With $2300 US Dead Presidents on the line, plus a massive points advantage in League competition, you can see why they're taking it so seriously.

Launched with huge fanfare at GenCon Indy 2006, Dreamblade defies a simple definition. It's not a miniatures war-game and it's not quite a board game. Wizards Of The Coast are describing it as a miniatures strategy game, which is good enough for us. The buzz on the day from various players in the tournament is that it's "kinda different." "Takes some getting used to." Perhaps most promisingly, a young lady tells me that "once you get used to the pace, it's a unique rule set." Dreamblade is clearly an attempt to synthesise what appeals to card, war, board and miniatures gamers and isolate the rules, techniques and goals of those varying games. The risk with something like that it becomes a dog's breakfast, an aimless mess. Luckily, with a rich back story and a deliberate rules system, its looks likely that Dreamblade is actually a success.

BACK STORY

The back story for Dreamblade is a strange one. Powerful psychics, Dream Lords, come together in a surreal world called the Dreamscape and summon up entities to battle one another. These Creatures, as the miniatures are called, each belong to an aspect representing the different areas of the consciousness of the Lords. Passion, Fear, Valour and Madness each shape the look and powers of the various Creatures. Fear warriors, for example, tend to be creatures of horror while Valour represents great warriors and Madness, well; those cats are just plain weird. Furthermore, some Creatures share traits with each other called Lineages that alters the dynamic of how they work together. The Warbands, as armies are called, are mad and beautiful looking sculptures. Like card decks, the Warbands are customisable by player. Unlike card games, Dreamblade really comes alive with some fabulous looking minis. At a 40MM size, they're also big chunks of plastic, well moulded and extravagantly designed by some of the world's finest fantasy artists.

Jonathan Tweet, one of the lead designers of the game, as well as one of the chief architects of the whole D&D rules and countless gaming classics, weighed in on his favourite soldier. "I like Faceless Stalker. She's simple, mysterious, and welcome in any fight. And I like Saint of Roses. He's a detailed, good-looking, unusual figure".

Finalist Sam Black had a rather different opinion, liking the big tough guys. "The Inscribed Axebeast, which takes a lot to get onto the board, is my favorite. It is just too hard to beat in a challenge."

"People are clearly drawn to certain Creatures or aspects. That appeal is going to affect players' Warbands. Even a player who doesn't know the world background can feel connected to some of the miniatures right away." says Tweet.

PLAY

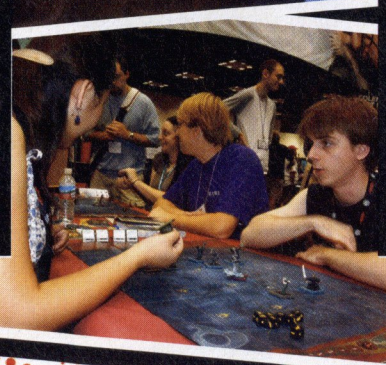
Dreamblade is a distillation of varying games with an emphasis on League tournaments and round robins. This means Dreamblade plays quickly, is easy to learn and has very defined victory conditions. It's one of those things that is straightforward to get into, the rules being aimed at a younger audience to start with. But like all good games it has that hard to master element that keeps you coming back.

Playing on a 5X5 grid, players bring out up to sixteen miniatures into the game. From Spawning Cell squares, Warbands must move to occupy Key Cells, which are worth victory points. The player with the most victory points at the end of a Round wins a point and the first to six points takes the game. The thing is, though, that in such a small space the game becomes tactical, almost like Chess, as Warbands spawn unevenly. The more powerful the Creature, the longer it may take to bring into the game, so you may have to bring on the big guns unsupported. During the Dreamblade tournament, a classic mistake made in several games I saw was an uneven approach to rallying troops. Either players would rely on powerful Creatures who could not hold enough Key Cells, or they would basically Zerg Rush for victory conditions, only to be wiped out the next round by ordered, supported defensive techniques. Of course, each Creature has various powers they can use to upset such orderly play. Things change as the game goes on, sometimes very quickly indeed.

Tweet commented "One of the unique features of the game is allowing Creatures

[Warning] Hands do not come with the grid map required to play

[Christian] Was aiming for a down blouse shot but fortunately missed



to work in unison. Multiple creatures can all be together in the same cell, where they can fight as a group. That speeds up combat. Dreamblade plays fast. There's less fiddling and more strategizing."

THE WIN

Dreamblade rewards those who play it smart. While anyone can rely on a powerful Warband, playing it smart and thinking tactically about the next move ahead pays off.

The grand final proves that. Twice, Sam moves quickly to not only take Key Cells but also to defend them. Twice he racks up victories by a mix of aggression and defence, moving firmly to not only take his Key Cells but to deny them to his opponents. On winning that second game, his concentration finally wavers and he flashes a laugh of pure nervous energy and spent aggression. 2K richer, he grins up at me. "Its all about holding positions" he says, "it's all about not letting them have what they want." <<

I'd like to thank god for my success and Dragonball Z for my hair!

MAIL HYPER!

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NSW 2016 Australia

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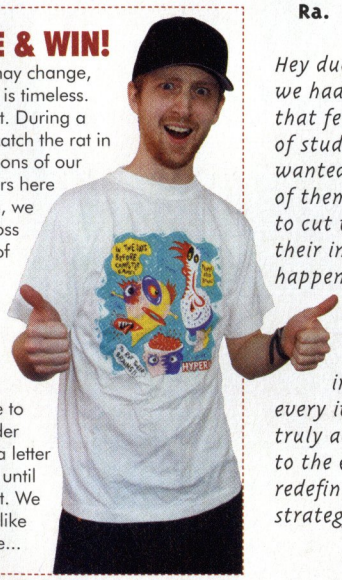
WRITE & WIN!

Fashion may change, but Hyper is timeless. Maybe not. During a game of catch the rat in the dungeons of our ivory towers here in Redfern, we came across a couple of boxes of ye olde crappy Hyper T-shirts. We'll be giving one to every reader who gets a letter published until we run out. We hope you like Extra large...



BUNGIE JUMPING

I was just reading your article on movers and shakers when I realised Bungie was not mentioned. I am sure you have your reasons for this, probably because the focus of the article was about studios that push the boundaries of our medium. This seems strange as some of the studios mentioned e.g. The creative Assembly did make the list for pushing boundaries and raising the benchmark in the strategy genre, exactly what Bungie have done with the FPS genre. The inclusion of vehicles, limited weapon storage, rechargeable health and having grenades and melee always ready have changed the way we play shooters. Although both these studios are pushing the boundaries of their genre it would be a big call to say either are pushing the boundaries of games industry in general.

Ra.

Hey dude, one of the hardest thing we had to do putting together that feature was cut a bunch of studios from the list that we wanted to include. Bungie was one of them but we eventually decided to cut them due to the fact that their innovation has already happened and now they are simply refining the style that they created with Halo. Creative Assembly we kept in due to the fact that with every iteration of Total War they truly add massive layers of depth to the experience and constantly redefine the benchmark for strategy.

[up] Bungie didn't quite make the final cut for the innovation feature

AUSSIES NOT NECESSARILY RULING

I thought it was about time someone wrote in about the sorry state of AFL games. As a die-hard AFL fanatic, getting my hands on each new instalment of the AFL game series (rental copies, mind you) is akin to watching at least one Uwe Boll movie every year, as a dearly-loved franchise is butchered beyond recognition by a bunch of guys who have clearly never even watched the thing. One thing I really don't get is this: if 'oh, an AFL game gets no funding coz it's only bought in four states' how does the NRL, a game that's played in TWO states, get a series of fully licensed controllers? (yes I know the sport is huge in Europe, but how many Penrith Panthers controllers are sold in England?)

The series just keeps getting worse, and money isn't even the issue. Rather, it boils down to simple features that shouldn't cost that much to be fixed.

For example, AFL Live 2003- whoever thought that an AFL game should be played from a side view, with every action mapped to one button (too much Kirby's Air Ride methinks) was high on something fantastic. It didn't get much better for Live 2004, which I have voted the absolute worst game of all time (seriously, if I reviewed it it would have gotten 5%). Live 2005 had a bunch of annoying glitches that really ruined a promising game, and some of them (such as handballs and kicks that happen two seconds after pressing the button) weren't present in the previous one.

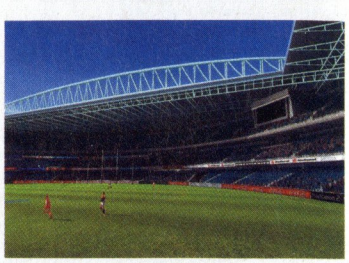
Now we have Live 2006, which I played in a store and have already written off. Clearly, someone has decided that you don't need to keep your eyes on the main screen while playing a game, which is why they have the kicking power gauge in the bottom left corner and the goal aiming thingy in the bottom right. What, does it cost an extra $100 to put the gauge in the middle of the screen? You know, where it was before?

I think a complete change of direction is in order. Screw the sim stuff, do an arcade game, do SOMETHING, or just forget the whole thing. This leads me to my serious question: is there a way to get a job in the gaming industry as a 'director', even if you have no programming skills whatsoever? You know, the kind of job where you come up with a game on paper and then tell the programmers what to do?

Oh, and just for the record, I do like extra large. ;)

Mister M

Heya Mr. M, we think what the AFL franchise really needs is not so much a development team that understands the game but one that understands the sports video game. The problem with the AFL series as we've seen it (and one of the major factors we haven't reviewed many) is that whilst the developers may understand the sport they just don't seem to grok the concept of actually making it realistic and fun. With the fantastic Hockey and Soccer games on the market we can only hope that this icon of national sport get some true representation at some stage. As for your question about controllers, we honestly have no idea why they were licensed. We can say one thing however, they were absolute rubbish. Now to your serious question, it sounds like you are talking about a Creative Director or Producer role. As far as getting into a position like that it seems to us to be a combination of luck and prior experience. Many



[up] We know nothing of AFL

CAPTION THIS!

Michael Pincott wins for the name of the protagonist alone

Kilty McBagpipes was appalled when Punk Boy suggested they take the orange spaceship for a spin downtown

Producers we have talked to have worked in film or TV previously, others have been writers or journalists, such as our own ex-alum Dan Toose.

SUPERHARDCORE!

With the exception of Jack Thompson or the OFLC, few topics of conversation raise the ire of gamers more than the dreaded 'casuals'. You already know what I mean but I'll explain it anyway.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest that 'casuals' are the bane of our existence. They're the ones to blame for all the dross on our shelves. It's not just that they're ignorant. Oh no, they are in fact conspiring to make the most appalling of purchasing decisions until our stores are deluged with generic, bland sequels and rip-offs.

It's easy to imagine your average casual gamer as the sort of V8-driving, 4X-drinking, blue-singlet wearing bogan who couldn't find his own arse with both hands, a torch and the Beaconsfield Mine Rescue Team. These are the guys who will walk into a game store and emerge with a copy of Rumble Roses or Xtreme Beach Volleyball, and a hole in their wallets to rival the ones in their thick skulls.

They determine which games to buy not on the basis of reviews or research. No, they just wander in and find the games with the biggest explosions, fastest cars and fakest boobs on the box art. Trying to convince them that the likes of Kirby or Beyond Good and Evil are brilliant games is likely to result in cries of 'I'm not playing that kiddie sh*t!'.

There's a chance they could be persuaded to play Metroid Prime or Metal Gear Solid, but they're unlikely to persist with them once they discover success requires more than holding down the fire button until everything blows up. These are the idiots who take the likes of 50 Cent: Bulletproof to the top of the charts while the Psychonauts and Icos languish in bargain bin obscurity.

Tempting as it may be to believe the above, the disappointing reality is that casual gamers are much more than this. Gaming is now something almost everyone does; but not everyone is a gamer. Just as everyone watches films but few people are film buffs. Only enthusiasts build model ships or knit teddy bears, but gaming has now emerged from a niche hobby to a mainstream past-time.

The true face of casual gaming is much more sedate. It's your kid sister playing Nintendogs. It's your grandma playing Brain Training. It's the housewife playing a few minutes of Bejewelled between emails. It's the bored office worker playing Solitaire instead of working. It's your mate renting V8 Supercars and even that annoying kid from the under-12s soccer who keeps banging on about The Sims.

So, as much as we may lament the commercial failure of the most critically acclaimed titles, we just have to accept that this is the reality of mainstream acceptance. In truth, a larger audience overall means not only more money for development of new systems and blockbusters, but a market more capable of supporting those niche games we love so much.

Kind Regards once more,
Ian Casey

We were all ready to jump down your throat for a second there Ian – there are few arguments that get our proverbial goat more than the lambasting of so called casual gamers. But we read on and you have the right point exactly. Sure people unfamiliar with games may make some bad decisions that drive the commercial success of rather lacklustre games but everyone is guilty of such crimes. We feel it's better to think of it this way; today's casual gamers are tomorrows hardcore.

WiiLY DIFFERENT

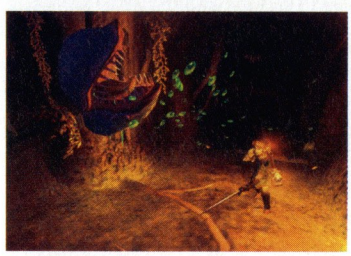
We are about to witness one of the biggest events in console history thus far with the launch of the the Wii and PS3 in time for christmas. With families divided already, the thought on everyones mind is "Who will win?" Firstly, I'm a huge Nintendo fan, albeit a dissapointed one with the success of the GCN, but I got my fair share of good times out of the little purple box and I'm happy to say I'll be lining up for a Wii come October. But why am I buying it? I really have no idea. I know that come Christmas I'll be playing Twilight Princess on my GCN, not the Wii. And the same goes for Sony, I'm eagerly waiting for FFXII and Kingdom Hearts 2 but they are both on the PS2. This is such a critical time for both companies but I'm not persuaded and Nintendo especially needs to pick up it's act. Let's face it the PS2's success came from its huge time on the market with no competition, but this is Nintendo's chance to match Sony step for step and win back a larger portion of the gamers out there. And it's looking good too, with a price of around $400 compared to $1000 many people will easily go for the Wii. Sites on the net show the Wii is already a popular contender and if Nintendo do this right, well then maybe us fanboys wont be at the butt of so many schoolyard jokes. But I'm not going out there and buying somethign that's new and a little scary just so I can play Mario Strikers Charged or Mario Party 17. Both Sony and the big N have alot of work to do if they want to be selling millions by christmas and I know Nintendo likes to keep us speculating but if I don't see something solid for a release then I'll be playing Twilight Princess with two hands at christmas.

Nick J

No matter the system you play Twilight Princess on you'll be playing with both hands Nick. Pedantry aside, I don't think you have to worry too much about the decision between the Wii and the PS3 at Christmas now. Being the backwater we are we won't be seeing Sony's new machine until 2007.

[up] Robyn Grellet surprises and delights with a pleasant lack of nudity

"A larger audience overall means... more money for development of new systems and blockbusters"



[down] Playing Zelda one handed has too many nasty connotations

HALFCORE

I'm writing to you in light of a recent change that has occured within my inner gamer - a change that has caused me one hell of a pause. Y'see about a week or two ago (with a surprising lack of kicking, screaming or any other reluctance) I uninstalled Counterstrike from my computer, wiped my Steam install and sat back in my chair; slightly amazed at the event that had just happened. With that one act I had finally embraced my transformation to a casual gamer. Call it a retirement, call it a resignation, call it what you want but I am now a player of games for enjoyment rather than 'the hunt'.

[above] Welcome to nerdsville. Population: Wilks

"I grabbed FlatOut 2 the other day and have had an enormous amount of fun with it..."

I grabbed FlatOut 2 the other day and have had an enormous amount of fun with it, leaning back in my seat and laughing out loud at times - a stark contrast to the viscious battle grin I would normally wear while hunched over my keyboard, popping off heads in any number of competitive online games. The question I pose to the crew at Hyper is; how many of you would consider yourselves casual gamers? Or probably a better question would be; how many of you would be casual gamers if it weren't your day job to play and review games? Don't get me wrong, when someone cracks out the Smash Bros. Melee I'm still all up for a session of trash talking; and I'm looking forward to the multiplayer component of Dark Messiah with something that can only be described as glee - but it's just not as important to 'beat' the game any more.

Anyway, keep up the good work guys and to all those hardcore superstar gamers out there - relax guy, it's just a game.

Phill

Well Phil, Wilks is a pretty hardcore World of Warcraft nerd but the truth is that outside of work most of us don't game a lot in our free time. Sure when a game comes out that we really want to play we'll take them home and give them a bashing (Wilks and Malky will spend hours on the new Final Fantasy when it comes out and Cam is always willing to hammer away at shooters or Ridge Racer). So I guess you could call us halfcore gamers. Not truly hard but far from casual.

[down] Ragdolling is the way of the future. Seriously.

NO THANKS NECESSARY

Like many others, I found HYPER to be a little flat in the issues following Eliot's retiring from Editor. It wasn't just that I missed Lord Seafood; something else was off. And though I never managed to pinpoint what the problem was, I am pleased to report that as of issue #155, HYPER once again kicks mondo arse. This snuck up on me, as there was nothing radically different about the mag at a glance. It still had the news, previews, reviews and other little segments as per usual, and nothing new seemed to have been added in. It was while reading the Yakuza review that I realised what it was. WRITING! Yes, I am aware that HYPER has always had words in it, what I am referring to is the quality of the reviews. I was almost in stitches at the way you described the shoddy camera, and read it again out loud so I could hear the words for real. And it didn't stop here. The review of Kingdom Hearts II had me back on the floor, as did Forbidden Siren 2.

Plus the golden captions are back, which is one of the reasons I stuck with HYPER in the first place.

I know good writing and humour seem to be the obvious starting grounds for almost any kind of magazine (the ones you hide under your bed don't count), but it's incredible how many fall so short of the mark. I mean, if I have to read one more "unzipping sound" joke I'll hunt down those juvenile wankers myself. Being something of a writer, I know how rare great wordsmiths are, so I thank you HYPER. And I especially thank Wilks, Staines, Staines again and whoever is in charge of captions over at the Redfern HQ. You really made my monday night.

Owenza

We're glad you like it champ. Without blowing our own trumpets we believe that Hyper is probably the strongest it has been in years at the moment and it should just keep getting better. Never fear, our pants shall remain firmly zipped during the captioning process.

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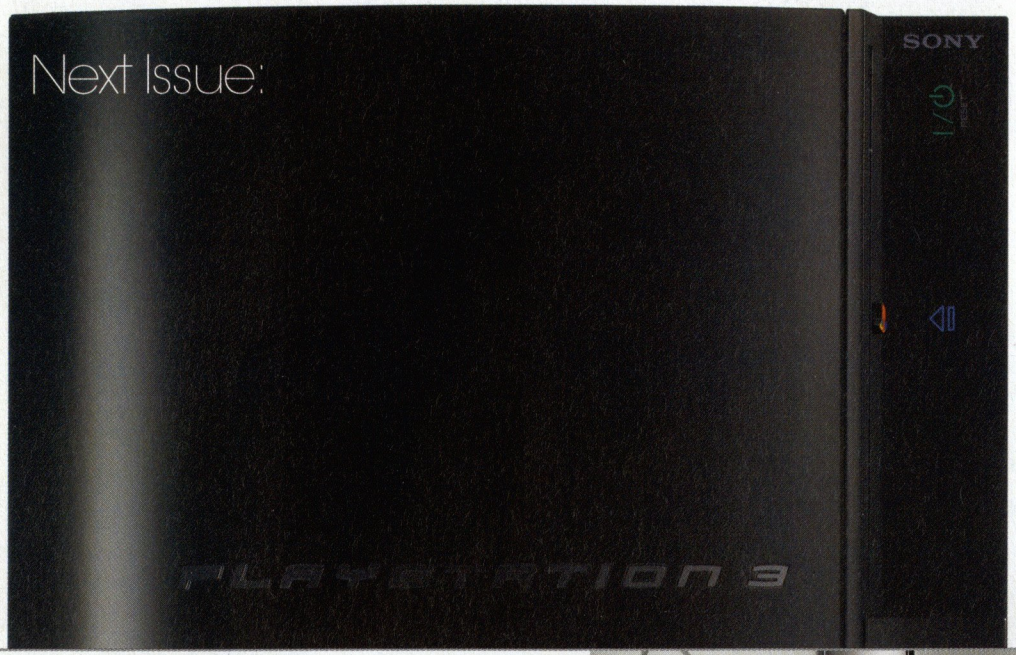
Next Issue:

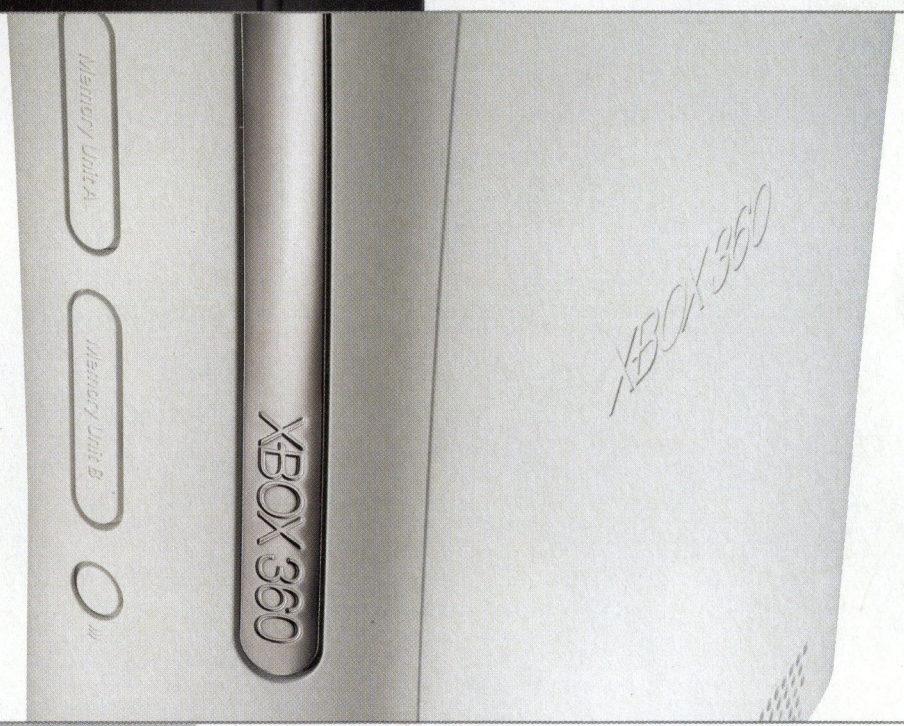


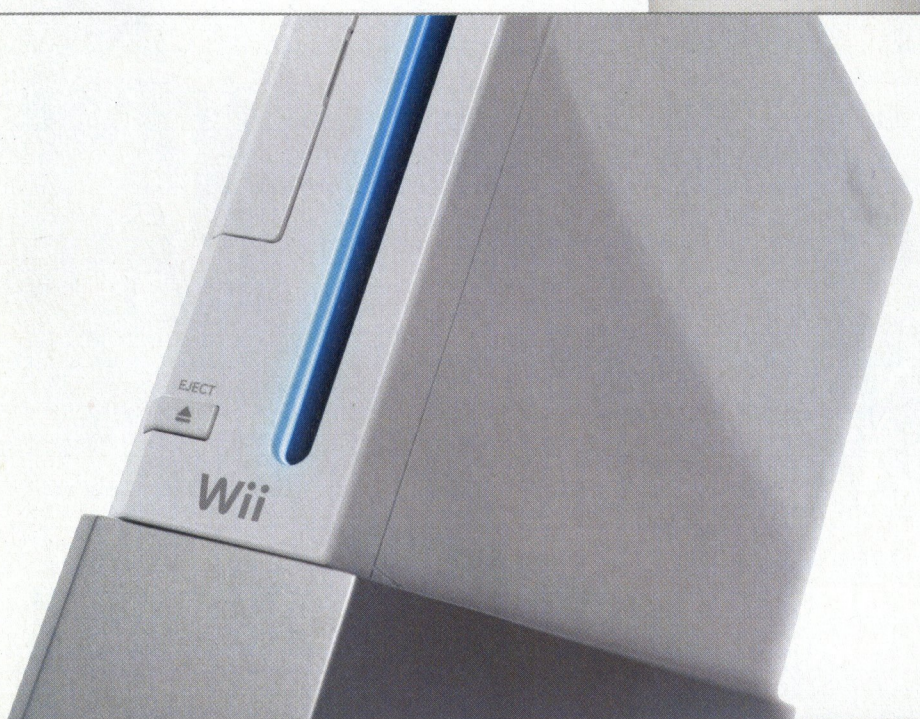
Tokyo Game Show

Hyper Team hits the home of console gaming to go hands on with a huge range of PS3 games – and plenty more!

X06

Our report on Microsoft's lavish event in Barcelona, including interviews with the top tier 360 developers and hands on with the key titles!





Wii Launch Feature

Come next issue we'll have spent some serious time with the Wii. Our report... and if you're really lucky the first wave of reviews!

Plus: Reviews of Gothic III, Dark Messiah, Splinter Cell: Double Agent, Defcon, Neverwinter Nights 2, Destroy All Humans! 2 and Scarface.

HYPER 158 ON SALE NOVEMBER 8

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