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HYPER

REVIEWED ON PS2

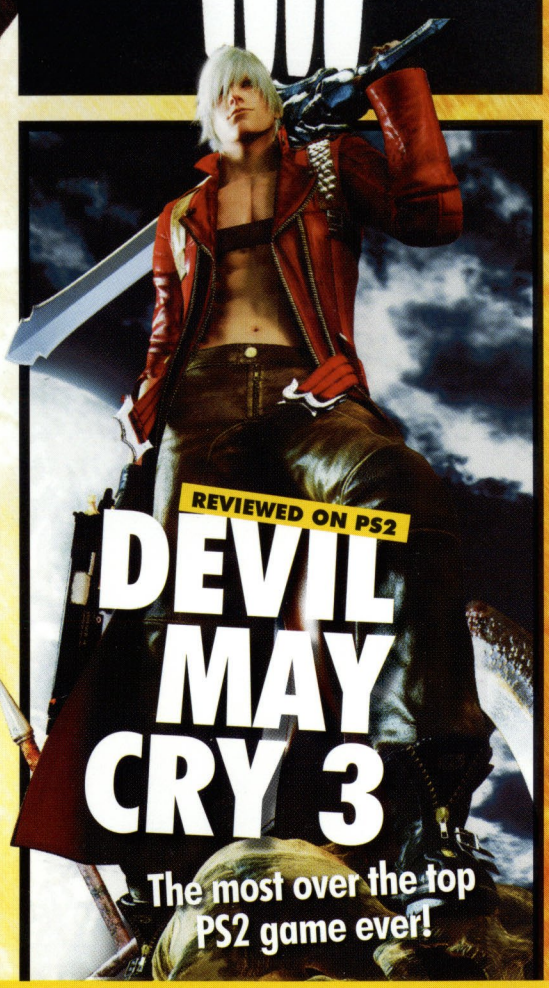
METAL GEAR SOLID 3

Masterful reinvention, or overblown melodrama?

PS2 / XBOX / PC

THE PUNISHER

Another Killer Comicbook License?



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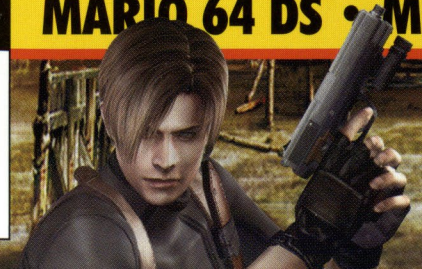

RESIDENT EVIL 4

The classic horror series returns, and it's not what you expected!

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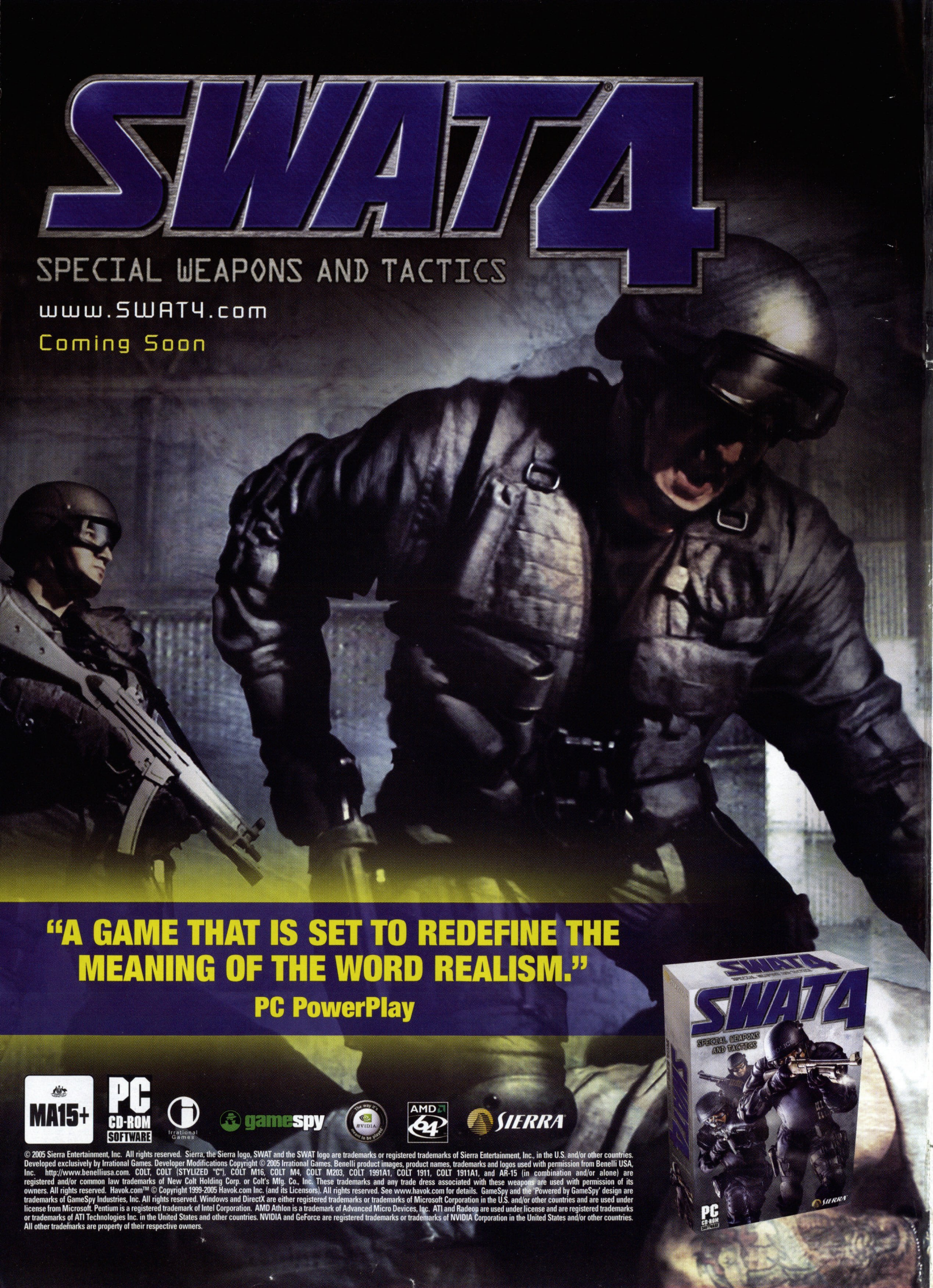

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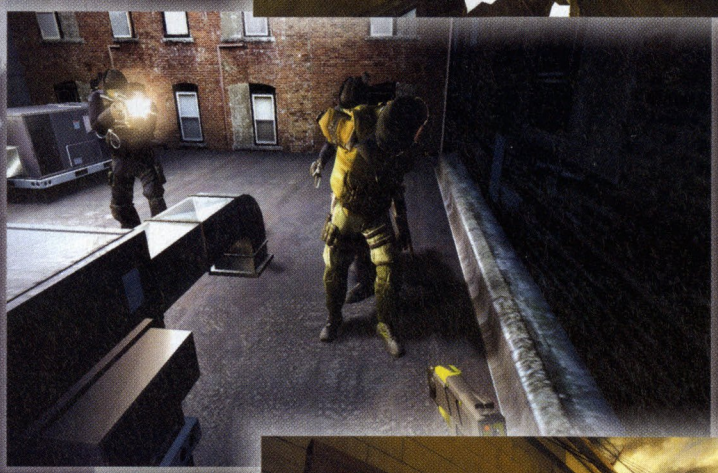

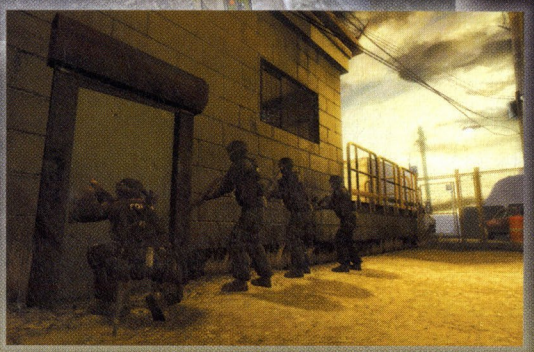

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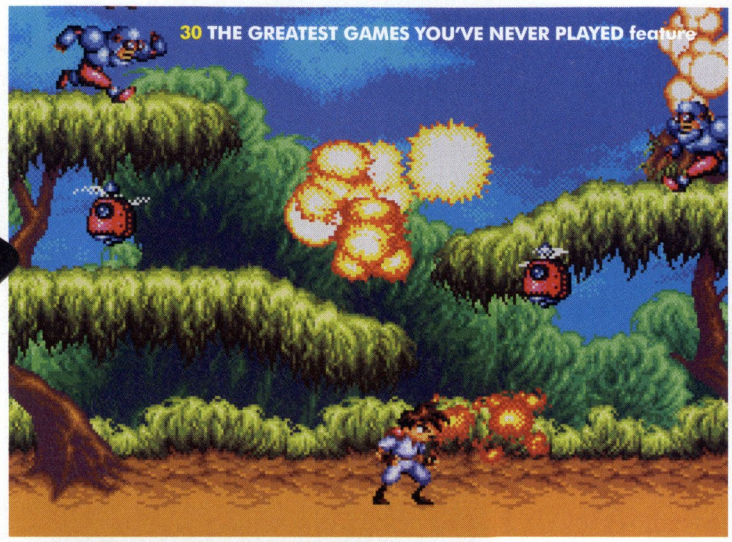

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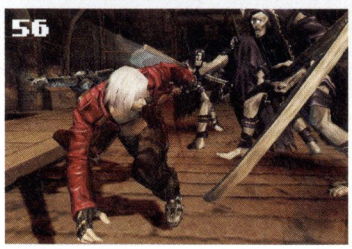

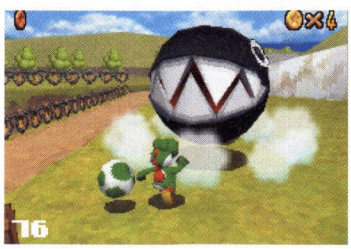

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EDITORIAL

>> It's been an interesting couple of months. We've had the first shots fired off by Nintendo and Sony in the war over handheld supremacy in Japan, with other territories soon to follow. We've had a bumper crop of games since the New Year, with titles like Resident Evil 4 and Metal Gear Solid 3 living up to their potential and then some. It doesn't end there either, as there are even more great titles on the way, including the long awaited Gran Turismo 4, which we've been playing the hell out of in preparation for next issue's review (sorry about the wait but we didn't want to rush into the review without exhaustive testing). We've heard details of the Cell processor and the possibility of a pre-E3 unveiling of the PS3, and it's been confirmed that both Nintendo's new system and Microsoft's will be at E3. In short, it's all hotting up right now, and the next 12-18 months are going to be very interesting indeed.

We've also been in the midst of an ongoing war between our readers, with large numbers jumping to our defense (you know who you are - thanks guys), while a small but impassioned group tell us how much we suck. As strange as this ongoing feud has been, we're inclined to take a silver lining approach. After all, you'd only get so upset about the magazine if you truly care about it, and it's true that Hyper has traditionally had the most loyal readership of all the Australian games magazines. It may be a double edged sword, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

Cam Shea >> Editor

[above] As Chairman Camga says "Allez jeu"

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Klonoa - PSone
   "From the Thousand Year Door to Door to Phantomile"
2. Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath - Xbox
3. Street Fighter Alpha 3 - PSone
4. Super Mario RPG - SNES
5. Ridge Racers - PSP

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. Paper Mario: The 1000 Year Door - GCN
   "All 8-bit characters should become wrestlers"
2. World of Warcraft - PC
3. La Pucelle Tactics - PS2
4. ADoM - PC
5. Waku Waku 7 - Saturn

Malcolm Campbell - Art Director
1. Street Fighter 3: 3rd Strike - Xbox
   "It's been a bit of a Streeties kind of month. But then most months are..."
2. Street Fighter Alpha 2 - PSone
3. Phantom Brave - PS2
4. rRootage - Mac
5. GTA: San Andreas - PS2

Amos "Wong Fei" Hong - Asian Correspondant
1. ESPN NFL 2K5 - Xbox
   "Hey Butters, give me a quote for ESPN NFL 2K5!"
2. NFL Street 2 - PS2
3. Darwinia - PC
4. Mono - PC
5. Resident Evil 4 - GCN

HYPER>>

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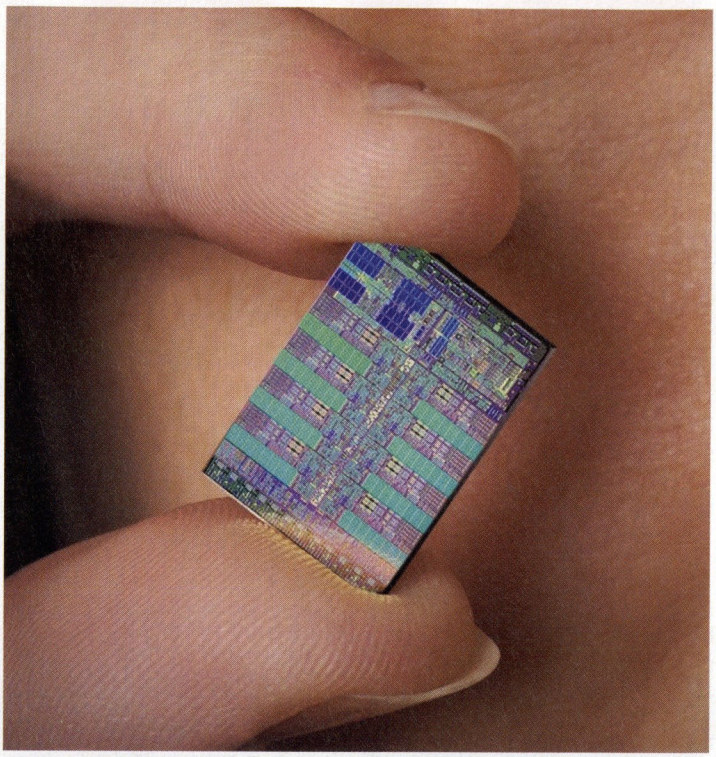
News

IN THE NEWS: John Romero inducted into the AIAS Hall of Shame / Pac-Man confesses he has a pill popping problem /

SONY

CELL(ER) DWELLER

More details on Cell



Each week new details come to life about Sony's next generation gaming console currently being called the PS3. Although the actual name of the system is yet to be finalised (PS3 does seem likely though) what is known is that it will be built around the Cell processor that Sony are developing in conjunction with IBM and Toshiba. The Cell processor will utilise a 64bit architecture supposedly capable of processing at upwards of 256GFLOPS (that's 256 billion floating point calculations per second for those of us that like our information to be in a language we can understand). To put that into perspective, most current CPUs such as the high end Intel processors only calculate at around 20GFLOPS so we are talking about nearly supercomputer processing speeds here. Theoretically this makes the Cell processor around 10 times more powerful than what we have on the market today and infinitely more powerful than the most powerful of the current generation of consoles.

Certain sources have also stated that during testing the processor has been successfully run at over 4.0GHz though the actual speed has not been mentioned. Of course the true power of the console will only be on par with the best programmers but IBM have stated that there will be a number of available programming languages and compilers allowing programmers to work in a form that they are comfortable with and experienced in.

Even more amazingly, the developers of the Cell have announced that despite the speed of the processor it will function using only air cooling (like the current generation of processors) and has five built in power levels to keep it running cool. Aside from the fact that we could have a behemoth gaming console in a little over a year, the Cell architecture is exciting because of the fact that it will add a new competitor to the market, hopefully spurring both AMD and Intel to do something equally or more impressive.

There have been rumours floating around that the PS3 will make some kind of debut before E3 this year (presumably to get a jump on both Microsoft and Nintendo who are said to be showing their new consoles at the trade event). This rumour has been confirmed but as of yet there are no firm details of where and when this unveiling will take place. We wouldn't be at all surprised if the event took place during the days immediately preceding E3 so that news and hype for the new console will hit websites a few days earlier than the competitors.

FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

SpinDrive Ping Pong PS2 **Developer:** Xplosiv • **The Hype:** The sport of kings on PS2

OVERFLOW

Best. Unlockable. Ever. The GameCube version of Fight Night Round 2 will include the SNES classic Super Punch-Out!! as a special unlockable bonus! You'll even be able to play as Little Mac in the main game.

As if the recent addition of bots to Counter-Strike Source wasn't enough, Valve are planning even more additions. Pretty soon Half-Life 2 Deathmatch will be getting three new weapons - the Crowbar, Stunstick and Slam, CS: Source will be getting the new "cs_compound" map, and Half-Life 2 will be getting a new single player map called "The Lost Coast" which is designed to showcase High Dynamic Range lighting (if you have a video card that's high-end enough to support it of course). Sweet!

We were desperately hoping that the whole Marvel Vs EA fighting game was a sick joke but apparently not. It's been revealed that a comic book series known as Marvel Nemesis: The Imperfects will be released in the lead up to the game. We also know that the game won't be featuring existing EA characters but will have an all new roster of heroes. Let's just hope they don't take a leaf out of Pepsi's book and create "EA Man".

The founder of Electronic Arts and all-round videogame visionary Trip Hawkins is the latest member of the videogame industry to be inducted into The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' Hall of Fame. The other gaming greats already inducted are Shiggy, Yu Suzuki, Peter Molyneux, Sid Meier, Hironobu Sakaguchi, John Carmack, and Will Wright.

The highly anticipated FPS S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl from Ukranian dev house GSC Game World has been delayed again. Given how ambitious the title is it's not particularly surprising. More news as we hear it.

Atari and Shiny have just unveiled "The Matrix: Path of Neo" where you play through all the best bits of the trilogy from Neo's perspective. It's due late 2005.

UFO

ALIEN INVASION

Funky PCs come to Oz

It's taken a while but the gamer specific PC building company Alienware have finally established a presence in Australia. With PCs starting at nearly $2000 and going up to nearly $13,500 for an extremely optimised beast of a machine Alienware certainly aren't cheap but if the reports are anything to go by then there are few things in the market that can compare with the systems. They also look pretty damn sexy too.

Alienware also sell a range of gaming optimised laptops (one of which features a 256Mb 6800 video card - that's better than most people have in their desktop machines) which look absolutely perfect for taking to a LAN party. We'll endeavour to get a few systems to test in upcoming issues so we can see for sure if they are the be all and end all of PC gaming goodness. Check out www.alienwaresystems.com.au

APPLE

LITTLE MAC

Yet another triumph of design

As far as modern computers go, there are few things cuter than the Mac Mini, a tiny form factor unit (6.5" square and 2" deep) that Apple recently unveiled. We wouldn't recommend the Mac Mini to anyone aside from those with too much money and a penchant for attractive things due to the fact that it's about as powerful as a run of the mill PC 5 or 6 years ago and clocks in at quite a hefty price tag for something that doesn't include a mouse, keyboard or monitor, but it is an interesting look at the direction computers may be heading. Whilst not a great computer, the Mac Mini is an excellent media box that looks dead sexy, can output to HD, burn DVDs, record movies, play MP3s and the rest. With any luck some PC company will jump on the tiny form factor bandwagon and make something that's tiny, sexy, affordable and, above all, well specced.

WINNERS

HYPER 136

KING ARTHUR

Jenny Curtis, Sefton Park, SA
Luke Turner, Chadstone, VIC
Gary Bateman, St Leonards, NSW
M. Stevens, Seaford Rise, SA
Dave Fairley, Chatswood, NSW

GUILTY GEAR X2 RELOAD

Dave Green, Pendle Hill, NSW
A. Devene, Narrogin, WA
Richard Coelho, Randwick, NSW
Oscar Dell'Anna, Kardinya, WA
Patrick O'Connell, VIC
Eleanor Preisig, Parkes, NSW

NVIDIA SLI MULTI-GPU TECHNOLOGY

PS3

NVIDIA + SONY

Sitting in a tree...

Nvidia and Sony are teaming up for the PS3 to make it the most graphically advanced console the world has ever seen. No idle boast considering that exact specifications (or any real information) about the GPU have yet to be released aside from the enigmatic statement that they are making a custom version of their next generation GPU. Whether this means that it will be a custom version of their next GPU or a custom current generation GPU is unknown. If they are working off the current generation of GPUs then it seems likely that the PS3 will feature at least two NVIDIA GPUs running simultaneously using the company's SLI technology. If the tales of the speed of the Cell processor are true then the GPU could be a bottleneck in the system but as with everything else console wise, only time and the ability to play it will tell.

CAPTION THIS!

PART 65

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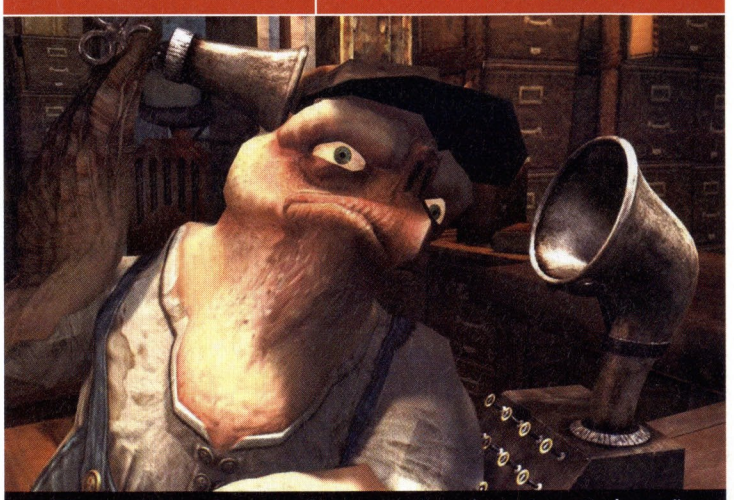


"Put me through to the funny caption department please"

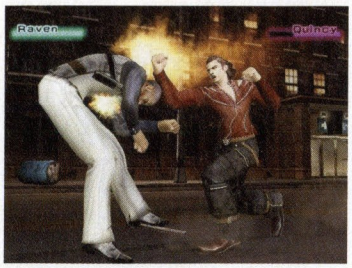
Bad Cop No Doughnut

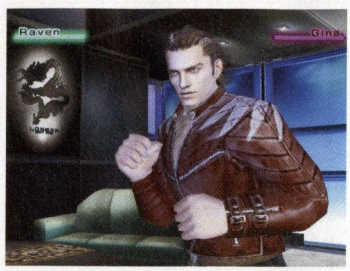
DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR

I was going to write my column this month about the abominable Uwe Boll and how he's single-handedly responsible for blackening the name of gaming in the mainstream press with his atrocious movies like House of the Dead and Alone in the Dark, but then something else happened that has pissed me off more. In the past I have labelled myself as a geek. I have no problem with being a geek - it's who I am. What I do have a problem with is people sending me hate mail because I don't fit into their preconception of who I am as a result. "I never see self-confessed nerds hanging out at the local pub drowning their scraggly bum-fluff beards in a big pint of ale" is one of those sentences that started my train of thought. For a start I'm a self confessed geek, not nerd and I like having a beer with the boys after work most days. It's a nice way to unwind and talk about work in a forum that is far less formal than sitting around an office. Why can't someone imagine me down the pub with the boys? Preconceived notions of what I am. I call myself a geek because that is what I see myself as - someone interested in technology and who more importantly understands its place in the world and the potential for future growth, someone who is obsessed with things that the mainstream find a little too niche to be cool (like Japanese horror movies, New Wave Korean cinema, comics, cyberpunk and myriad other things), has a brain full of SCIENCE! and knows that the word originally meant the person in a sideshow who would bite the heads off live animals and perform other strange/disturbing feats. Send me hate mail. I love it. Just hate me for who I am instead of who you think I should be - unless you think I should be Enrique Iglesias and then you should hate away with all your might. Oh yeah, back to the original point, Uwe Boll is the devil.

FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

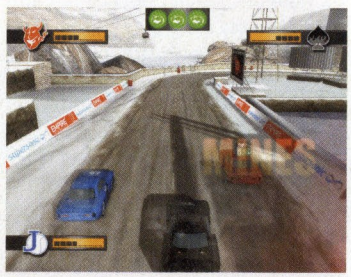
Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance **PS2/XBOX** **Developer:** Cavia • **The Hype:** Def Jam: Fight for NY meets GTA, Capcom style





FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Mashed: Fully Loaded **PS2/XBOX/PC** **Developer:** Supersonic • **The Hype:** More Mashed multiplayer madness!



TEKKEN ANOTHER LOOK!

Stubbs the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse **XBOX/PC** **Developer:** Wideload Games • **The Hype:** A zombie love story

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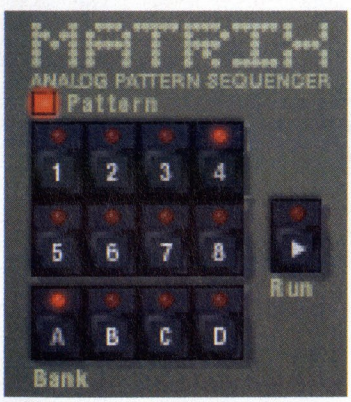
The Art of the REMIX

Kosta Andreadis

Music found in both film and television is a widely appreciated art form, an indispensable counterpart to the on screen image - it can help build tension and manipulate mood on both a conscious and subconscious level. This is true of all the primarily visual mediums, including videogames. But of all the visual mediums, sound design and music in videogames seems to be the least recognised and respected as an art form. Part of this is probably due to the formative years of videogame music, where simple melodies and beeps were created using primitive sound hardware, from the accelerating tempo of Space Invaders to Donkey Kong's simple but catchy theme. Although sounding unlike anything available at the time, it wasn't until the work of early videogame music pioneers like Koji Kondo (Super Mario Bros.) and Nobuo Uematsu (Final Fantasy) that the public's conception of what constitutes "game music" was shaped.

In recent years there's been an enormous leap in sound design and music found in videogames, not only in terms of the technology and tools used but most importantly in immersing the player into the game world. Music composition in videogames is no longer technologically restricted and so the general consensus that "game music" should sound like a simple and catchy MIDI arrangement is slowly disappearing. Complex arrangements, live instrumentation, and advanced MIDI techniques that can change music according to player's actions can be found in most games today. In fact, a traditional score - usually associated with film, whereby a composer writes the music which is then performed by an orchestra, is not uncommon in some games. And so the classical view of game music has shifted quite drastically, from programming simple sounds to the inclusion of streaming audio files, most notably due the increase in available data storage.

Programming game music is not a relic of the past, technology has allowed for some great leaps in virtual instrument representation and MIDI, thanks to the many hardware advancements and software tools readily available. In fact, software available today provides almost



Remix *- A remix is a musical and artistic re-interpretation of a particular piece of music or song. A remix can add quite considerably to the existing piece as well as take it into new musical territory, and as such is only as good as the remixer and his/her intentions. A vocal or melody sample over driving techno or a breakbeat is not a remix.*

MIDI *- Musical Instrument Digital Interface is data that can efficiently represent musical performance information which in turn can be read by a synthesizer or software synthesizer to recreate the sound. No audio is stored in a MIDI file, only instructions.*

Loops *- Can be a drum line, synth line or any instrumental excerpt that when played repeatedly gives the illusion of continuous music. Loops can be created via sampling source material and editing wave patterns in audio editors like Cool Edit Pro and Sound Forge.*

anyone with a PC access to powerful synthesizers, drum kits, sequencers, samplers, virtual instruments, and studio quality production tools. Music hardware that used to cost in the tens of thousands can now be had for a fraction of the cost as software applications and the advent of more powerful PCs has helped spawn a new type of musician known as the 'bedroom artist'. Using the PC as the main instrument, what we now classify as 'electronic music' is in essence very similar to what many used to deem as 'game music'. That is, simplistic musical sounds programmed and created with a computer. And now the availability of sequencers and samplers has opened the door to countless aspiring musicians to reinterpret their tastes, using their own musical history to express themselves.

To many the remix is seen as a dance floor friendly version of a rock or pop song, and is most common within the electronic music genre (and its countless sub-genres). But in essence the possibilities of a remix are endless - an entire piece can be reconstructed in detail to create something entirely new, which is something that most people tend to forget when thinking about a remix. Electronic and videogame music share a very similar history, both

Getting the Music *- When remixing, the most common approach is to reconstruct original source material, which usually involves sampling or obtaining original audio files and data. In terms of videogame music the two options would be to use a MIDI file as the point of reference or samples obtained from the original recordings. Extracting music from a game is done via emulators or music rippers for a particular console and so the legal ramifications make this option viable but not entirely legal. On the other hand obtaining pre-existing MIDI arrangements for videogames is quite easy.*

Software Breakdown

Although there are many different pieces of software available, more often than not each product aims to be a complete music studio package so here's a breakdown of the big boys. Thankfully each site allows you to download a demo as well as provide access to invaluable tutorials.

Reason
http://www.propellerheads.se/
In terms of music creation software, this is the big cheese, a fully integrated music production package. Everything from samplers, synths, drum machines, sequencing and effects. Its only flaw would be in the sequencing department where the software lacks considerably when compared with Sonar or Cubase. Ideal for those looking to experiment, the limitless knobs and tweaks available boggle the mind.

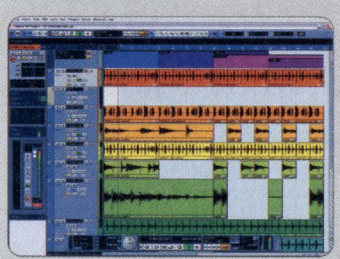
Cubase
http://www.steinberg.net/
What began as a simple MIDI and audio sequencer has grown to include some powerful virtual instrumentation, EQ and effects. Like all sequencers this program is a lot kinder to musical newbies than Reason, and with powerful VST (Virtual Studio Technology) Effects and VST Instruments, this is the program of choice when dealing strictly with MIDI.

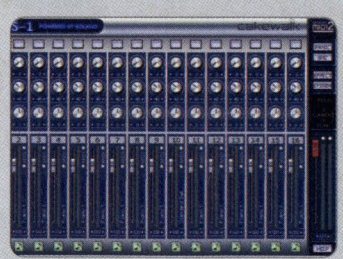
Sonar
http://www.cakewalk.com/
Complete package that offers mixing, processing and sequencing of both audio and video with easy integration of soft synths and instruments. The latest versions offer full surround sound support with amazing results, making this an entire production studio in software form.

Kontakt
http://www.nativeinstruments.de/index.php?kontakt_us
A fully featured and easy to use software sampler that is as powerful as you would like a sampler to be and then some. Any WAVE file on your PC is a sample and the stunning ease as to how Kontakt can sample, mulitsample, and drum map is impressive but like all sampling it is very hardware intensive and you'll need a lot of RAM to cope.

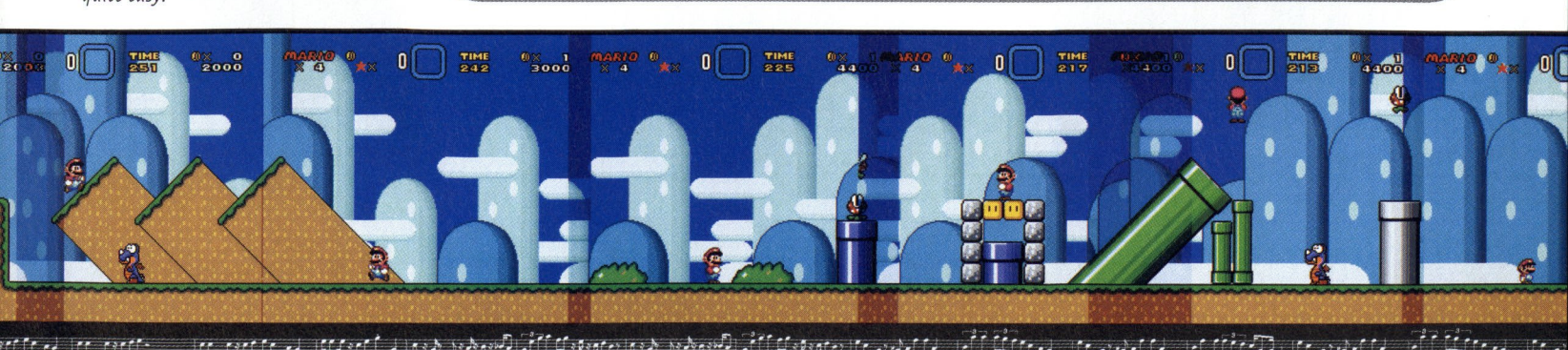
Fruity Loops
http://www.fruityloops.com/
The old workhorse, it's been around for years, and in its latest incarnation is still as powerful, impressive and easy to use as it ever was. This is the program of choice for creating realistic drum loops and lines. Fruity Loops is a pattern based sequencer so it's ideal for beginners with its easy to use step sequencer and piano rolls.

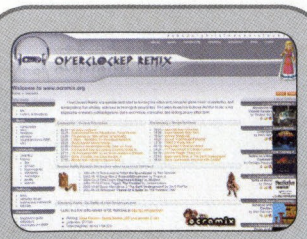
Acid Pro
http://mediasoftware.sonypictures.com/products/acidfamily.asp
In terms of loops based sequencers Acid has been around for a while now and only recently has become part of Sony's Media Software Line. The straight forward drag and drop interface is simplistic but the inclusion of powerful effect tools and mastering make this a piece of software not to be judged lightly.





[top] Reason in the house! **[above left]** Cubase **[above right]** Sonar





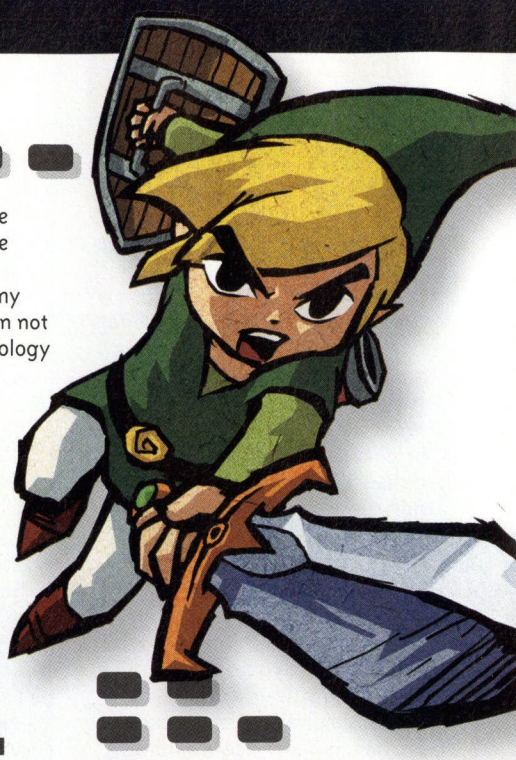
ONLINE AND IN TOUCH

There are many videogame remix communities online but none more comprehensive and enjoyable as David Loyd's 'Overclocked Remix' (www.ocremix.org) which offers a home to thousands of budding remixers giving them access to a wide audience of very eager listeners. This site also offers great examples of what constitutes good and bad remixes, and is well worth checking out. The VG Music Archive (www.vgmusic.com) offers a staggering 18,000 or so MIDI representations of classic videogame music and is a great resource. Those looking for beats, bass lines and sound scapes need to go no further than Looperman (www.looperman.com) a free audio resource that offers thousands of free loops and samples.

are reliant on technology and both are continuing to evolve at a steady pace. Both genres have a rich history with MIDI, audio hardware and programming, and so it's no wonder that many bedroom artists look to remixing the adventures of Mario as well as their favourite rock bands or composers. Remixing videogame music is not a new idea, nor is it a small portion of the evolving online music community, and quite like its non-videogaming counterpart, there is true artistry involved and a great videogame remix can provide new depth to now classic musical pieces. Funnily enough many of the videogame remixes found today tend to live in the more primitive era of the genre, where the music remixed tends to be from games from the 80s and early 90s. Although the early works of the likes of Kondo and Uematsu may sound dated and simplistic to most, the creativity and depth of their most famous compositions have entrenched themselves in the collective minds of gamers everywhere, and so most videogame music remixers look to the music that has helped shaped this musical genre when creating new compositions.

To remix a piece of music one does not need to have extensive musical training or even know how to play an instrument at any advanced level. More often than not a clear understanding of technology and musical structure will get you a lot further. A remix can contain a lot of things from new and altered riffs, drum beats and melodies to obscure sampling, changes in tempo, and added effects. As with any interpretation a remix should have a clear goal, and although it may sound a lot more difficult as the list of requirements grows, there are many tools readily available that can cover these. The no-brainer is a PC with a competent soundcard, CPU, RAM and hard drive space. Although invaluable, a musical instrument like an electronic keyboard or guitar is not essential, software can provide more than enough tools at your disposal without placing any limitations on your creativity. All facets of the remix production process can be completed with software - that is sequencing, sampling, recording, mastering, and distribution.

If you are dealing with MIDI, VST instruments and Cubase can provide

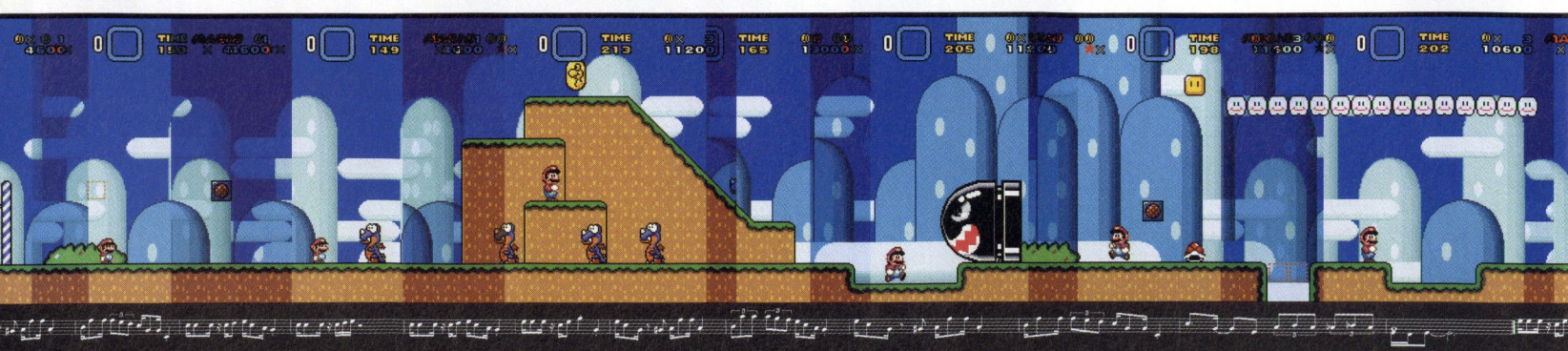


TOP TEN VIDEOGAME MUSICAL SCORES

1. **The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past** - Koji Kondo
2. **Final Fantasy VII** - Nobuo Uematsu
3. **Chrono Trigger** - Yasunori Mitsuda
4. **Jet Set Radio** - Hideki Naganuma
5. **Super Mario World** - Koji Kondo
6. **Metroid Prime** - Kenji Yamamoto
7. **Perfect Dark** - Grant Kirkhope
8. **Donkey Kong Country** - David Wise
9. **Secret of Mana** - Hiroki Kikuta
10. **Warcraft 2** - Glenn Stafford

Sequencers *- Sequencing involves arranging each piece of the music together and is usually completed with software like Sonar, Cubase, Ableton Live, Fruity Loops or Acid. Sequencers control the time signature, BPM and overall key of the piece. Each musical layer (beat, synth line, vocal sample) can be added, removed and manipulated at precise points to create a cohesive song structure.*

Drums and Beats *- When using drums, they can either be sequenced using drum kits or looped. When programming drum lines it is best to approach this as a sequencer and not a drummer, timing of the kick drums, snares and high hats are very important for both experimentation and conventional drum lines. For example with a 4/4 beat the kick drum and hi-hat would be programmed along a grid like pattern sequencer. Using drum loops can be very restrictive in terms of altering patterns and experimentation but they are great for providing that raw sound missing from most beat creation software.*



Choosing software unfortunately is not an easy task as most of the popular sequencers on the market provide fantastic tools and features, allowing for easy integration of MIDI, programming, mastering and effects. So in the end it's a matter of personal preference, and more often than not more than one program can be used, using each of their strengths and weaknesses. For example the virtual instrument capabilities of Cubase (called VST plug-ins) allow the user to alter any MIDI file to sound like numerous instruments from classic Moog and Rhodes piano/synthesisers to numerous string instruments. For videogame remixing in particular, if you are dealing with a MIDI source file, VST instruments and Cubase can provide some startling results through simple experimentation and fiddling. Another example would be the incredible simplicity of sequencing and arranging a final mix with Acid Pro and Ableton Live, as they both provide a simple time line interface with great cross-software capability, and are perfect for those who use a lot of samples and loops.

The type of remix will dominate the choice in software requirements. Will it be a beat intensive mix with minimal synths, or will it focus on arrangement and re-construction of the original melody? It all factors in but for beginners looking to kick-start a remixing career with little musical knowledge it would be best to focus your efforts with simple beat creation software like Reason and Fruity Loops with a minimal focus on synth lines and a heavy focus of sampling and looping. Using samples and loops may sound restrictive but it all depends on the context and way in which they are used, some musical creations composed entirely of loops and samples can sound more impressive and contain more musical depth than ones that are fully instrumental. The technology on offer won't make the music for you; buying a program and making good music with a computer isn't as easy as some would believe. Whether it's playing instruments or using soft synths and a sequencer, making crap music is just the same, creativity and talent are the driving force behind all great music and the computer can be an instrument as much as a guitar.

It would take a lifetime to learn the ins and outs of most of the musical creation software available on the market, but thankfully experimenting with all the different options, effects, filters and digital knobs can be a lot of fun. In fact through experimentation you could very well stumble across some very interesting musical sounds that would be perfect for your composition. Which is why remixing can be quite different to writing a traditional song - the focus is as much on deconstruction as it is on reconstruction, making the process quite an engrossing experience. On the other hand you might be content to download the Super Mario theme in MIDI and create a happy hardcore remix in five minutes. <<

Sampling *- The process of taking a piece of existing music or audio and embedding it into your remix and/or original production. Although there are copyright issues, most musical samples can be tweaked, time-stretched, cut up and altered to the point where it's no longer recognisable, and some of the best examples of sampling take this sort of creative liberty with their source material. A sampler is a cross between an audio digitiser and a synthesizer, in essence it samples (digitises) sounds, turns them into musical notes, and then plays them back through a synthesizer-like keyboard.*

Mastering *- It doesn't end with composition and arrangement as mastering the final product with a sequencer can mean the difference between a crap sounding bootleg and a professional sounding piece of music. That means keeping an eye on the decibel levels, volumes and panning of each channel.*

TOADOVSKY CHIMES IN!

Hyper's resident fungus remixes two games, the retro classic Faxanadu and the modern masterpiece that is Metroid Prime. Available to download from the remix section at www.doesmannerism.com, Toadovsky took some time from his recent scoring session for Rob Schneider's new comedy "Rob Schneider is A Swiss Army Knife" to talk about each remix:

Faxanadu (1988 NES)

Town Theme (Toadovsky's electro glitch f#%k workout)

"Electro is all the rage these days, and it's funny how musical styles keep recycling, apart from Punk which is more like regurgitating. Anyway this remix used the MIDI track of the original production, bass line and drum samples created using Fruity Loops, and some nifty samples and loop manipulation."

Metroid Prime (2002 GameCube)

Phendrana Drifts (Toadovsky's lightly slapped quiet bitch mix)

"Musical ambience is easy enough to create, but without an emotional structure or purpose it's pretty much worthless. This ambient mix was created almost entirely of samples and although ambient it's doesn't fall under the dreaded 'chill out' category. In fact anyone that thinks 'chill out' is a musical genre has a whore for a mother and a alcoholic for a father."

TIMESHIFT

Available on **PC, Xbox** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Saber Interactive** ■ Available: **Late 2005**

There's an increasing trend in games to utilise time manipulation as a gameplay mechanic (think Blinx, Max Payne and Prince of Persia to name a few), but remarkably TimeShift is the first to really integrate it into the core of a first person shooter. Better still, it's not window dressing on top of a standard shooter - it's integral to the game and opens up the gameplay in much the same way that the physics system did in Half-Life 2. TimeShift's sandbox-like gameplay will be compelling in itself, but complementing this is an amazing graphics engine that's able to bring Saber Interactive's unique vision of a future dystopian world to life. To find out more, we spoke to Saber Interactive's CEO, Matthew Karch.

Hyper: Will Rock was the first game for Saber Interactive, and it was a deliberately old school FPS. TimeShift sounds very different. What inspired the decision to go in this direction?

Matthew: We have always wanted to do a game like TimeShift. We just weren't prepared to do it four years ago when we were developing Will Rock. Our decision to create Will Rock as our first title was based on a large number of factors. Some of those factors were design-related and others were simple economics. When we set out to design our first game as a team our primary consideration was doing something that we thought was manageable for a first project. Straight ahead shooters that focus solely on action are generally easier to create from a design and production standpoint. Will Rock had a much simpler design, and a shorter development cycle than more involved games like TimeShift. Taking on a large project was something that we didn't feel comfortable with at that time. There were also financial factors that influenced our decision. We figured (and rightly so) that publishers would be more apt to risk a small development budget on a smaller game for a studio's first title than to spend on a marquee title. Publishers in general are a pretty risk-averse group and we highly doubted that we would be able to sell a non-budget game in our first outing.

TimeShift is a game of tremendous scope and depth. It incorporates sophisticated level design, a game progression that mandates constant application of the game's time shift mechanics, a tightly integrated storyline and a highly distinct art-style. While I am not saying that we couldn't have handled this game as a first title, we were much better served by putting it off until we felt 100% confident in our abilities as a team. Thus, while we would have loved to have started with a more ambitious project like TimeShift, we felt it was wise to get our feet wet collectively as a studio before pursuing bigger projects.

What did you learn as a studio from Will Rock?

This is a great question and to do it justice I would probably need to devote pages and pages of text which would bore your readers (unless of course they plan on entering the industry). I will summarize a few of the more important lessons that we learned:

Gameplay Rules: When we created Will Rock it was essentially a tech demo that turned into a game. Even back then we had great technology and we thought that great visuals would be enough to sell the game. This is not meant to imply that we didn't focus on gameplay but rather that we gave undue emphasis to the creation of rendering technologies - most such as Serious Sam. I think that in some respects we paved the way for Painkiller to get better reviews because people had gotten the "Serious Same" comments off of their chest with our game. This time around we wanted to do something that would draw few comparisons but that would be judged on its own merits. I think we have really accomplished that with TimeShift.

Choose Your Partner Carefully: The ultimate direction that a game takes in the design stages and beyond is heavily influenced by the publishing partner. Atari is an unbelievably good partner for the type of game we are making. They understand the genre, they know what it takes to make the game appeal to the broadest range of consumers and they know how to position the game in the marketplace. We have a great concept with TimeShift and had the opportunity to work with any one of a number of publishers. We chose Atari in part because of their solid reputation as a publisher of quality games, in part because of their strong support of 3rd party development and in part because the production team has sold millions upon millions of units in the FPS genre.

OUR GAME WILL BE ON THE LEVEL OF SOME OF THE FIRST GEN XBOX 2 GAMES

of which were not even utilized in the game due to time, budget and minimum spec constraints. While visuals can bring in the first group of gamers it is the gameplay that keeps 'em coming back. Will Rock was a fun game that received good reviews from some of the leading publications and so-so reviews from others. Had we taken the resources that we put into visuals and used them to enhance gameplay our game would have come out even better.

Originality is Key: In today's saturated market the key to receiving acclaim from gamers and the press is to come up with an original concept that is fun in practice. While with Will Rock we really didn't have the resources to do it we felt that it was more harshly received by some than it otherwise would have been because it was clearly strongly influenced by titles

Is it true that TimeShift, formerly known as Chronos, was originally in development for Xbox 2? And if so, why the switch to current gen technology?

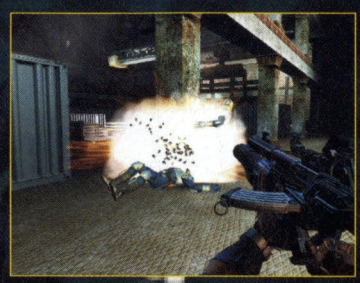
TimeShift was never planned for development on the Xbox 2. Somehow these rumors get started and spread like wildfire on the internet. Our game (which was originally called Chronos) was always planned for PC and Xbox development.

What would you have been able to do on Xbox 2 that you can't do on Xbox?

This is another great question that is very difficult to answer as our game was planned for the Xbox. Had we planned the game for the Xbox 2 from the beginning we would have been able to do certain things differently. I should say

[above] A wing and a prayer

[below] Proof that smoking is bad for you



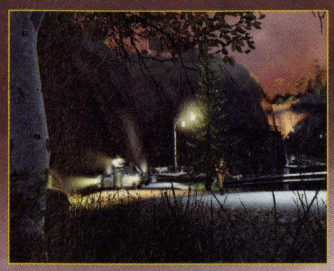
however that while the Xbox 2 will run circles around the Xbox from a graphics rendering standpoint, we will still be able to attain incredible visuals on the Xbox and to create exactly the type of gameplay that we have planned for. Having said that, the Xbox 2 would have allowed for us to add elements that we cannot include due to limitations in the hardware. For example we would have been able to make levels larger with greater draw distances due to increased memory. We would have also been able to add elements that you will see in the PC version such as parallax mapping and HDR which the Xbox does not support. Of course we would also have been able to increase texture resolution and the overall world detail considerably. In spite of this, I am really confident that people will be blown away by the game on the Xbox. Having seen some other Xbox 2 games that are early in production I really think that our game will be on the level of some of the first generation Xbox 2 games that come out. The bottom line is that our game on the Xbox will look really great, and as a game that is coming out in the latter half of the console's lifecycle it should.

Where and when is the game set, and what kind of world is it?

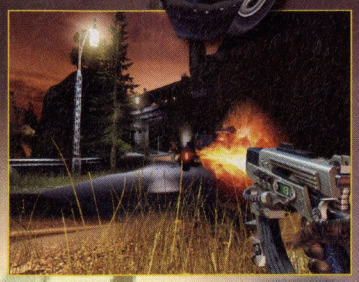
TimeShift is set in the not-too-distant future but it is not the future that you and I envision when we try to think ahead ten or twenty years. The future is much closer in line with something that Orwell or Zamyatin may have envisioned. The world is a dystopia ruled by a madman. The premise is that someone has found a way to go back over a century into the past and change the timeline. The result is a world dominated by a modernistic take on quasi-Victorian architecture. The game begins in this oppressive environment as a group of rag-tag rebels battle the regime in the war-torn streets of the capitol formerly known as Washington DC. Into this environment our hero appears, somehow transported from an alternate world.

Who is the main character and how did he come to have these powers?

The main character is your prototypical reluctant hero. He has found himself somehow transported from his familiar world into this strange place where everyone and everything look different. The very existence of his own world has been wiped from the timeline, replaced by this dystopia. The player's appearance in this world is not a coincidence, but rather is the result of certain experiments with time manipulation and time travel in which he took part at the game's



[main pic] The dystopian outfits of the future



beginning. Armed with these powers to control time, our hero (the player) must find out what happened to his world and do whatever he can to restore it.

Time manipulation sounds like a very powerful ability - tell us about designing levels around this, and how you ensure that the game is challenging.

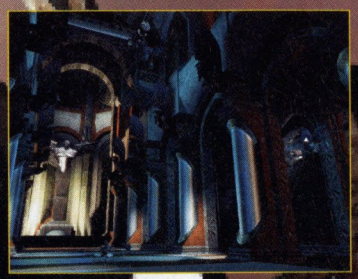
The time control mechanic entirely changes the dynamic of designing the game. These design implications range from crafting the actual time control system to creating areas in the game where using the time powers are necessary (or at least strongly advised). There are several key limitations to the time control power which, while not limiting its effectiveness as a tool for manipulating the game world do mean that the powers are not a dominant strategy. The first limitation is that using time-reversal does not impact the player in any way. In other words, a player can't reverse time to come back to life or to reduce damage to himself that has already been done. Therefore reversal cannot be used to gain another life or additional health. Another limitation is that the player will not have unlimited access to the powers. They will be a limited resource (more on this in the next answer). Even with these limitations, levels, opponents and even weapons have to be designed with the potential use of these powers in mind. This makes it necessary to design-test-repeat many times over during the course of development.

A PLAYER CAN'T REVERSE TIME TO COME BACK TO LIFE OR TO REDUCE DAMAGE

[right] Falling down a K hole

Will time control be available in limited doses, or is it infinite?

As I mentioned above the time control powers are implemented as a limited resource. The power to control time uses energy and this energy is finite. Furthermore, all powers will run off the same energy source and will require varying degrees of energy to initiate the effect. Therefore the player really needs to think about when he wants to use a particular power or risk



[right] The dynamic lighting of the future

that another more necessary power will not be available in a time of greater need.

Tell us about what new kinds of puzzles and gameplay you're able to incorporate based on time manipulation.

Time shifting allows the player unprecedented control over a game's environment. Proper utilization of the power will allow the player to defy gravity, deceive AI, avoid deadly oncoming projectiles, prevent certain things from happening or reversing them if they do and to generally manipulate the laws of physics. Imagine being able to avoid detection by breaking an object, jumping inside of it and reversing yourself back inside. Imagine the ability to jump on a recently fallen object and reverse time to "fly" back up with it. Imagine the power to stop a falling object in mid-flight and step on it as if it were solid. These are just a small handful of examples that illustrate the power of time manipulation. The game is replete with challenges and obstacles that require employing the proper time strategy. I am sure if you think about it you will come up with tons of compelling examples as well.

How much freedom will the player have to use time control abilities creatively?

The player can really use the time powers whenever he wants (and has the requisite energy to do so). The mechanic is a lot of fun to just play around with independent of the game. It is fun to blow things up, watch opponents rocket-rag doll into the sky and crash land and then reverse the whole thing and do it again. It is also fun to freeze a charging opponent in mid-air, take out your rocket launcher, shoot him and watch him get blown back 50 meters in the air when the effect ends. There are also ways to solve puzzles which just naturally emerge from utilizing the mechanic. We have noticed from testing that some players get really creative with the power and are able to find ways to move through the game that were totally unintended.

We've heard that TimeShift has a very cool arsenal of weapons for the player. Can you tell us about some of them?

There really isn't much I am allowed to say at this point. I can say that your statement above is accurate. The fantasy - sci-fi world that we have created has allowed us to be pretty imaginative in our weapons design in terms of their look, feel and effectiveness. As soon as I can reveal more I will. Stay tuned!

TIME SHIFTING ALLOWS UNPRECEDENTED CONTROL OVER A GAME'S ENVIRONMENT

The storyline has been written by a "renowned Hollywood writer and director". Can you tell us who it is and what they've worked on in the past?

Not right now. However, our stated goal was to create a story that would motivate gamers. I am the type of gamer who hits "escape" at every cinematic. We wanted to remove this tendency for all but the most disinterested gamers. We are accomplishing this by keeping the cinematics, short, informative, believable and to the point. The writer has done a superb job of accomplishing this.

How does the collaborative process work between Saber Interactive and your script writer? What kind of material/ directions is he given to work from, and how much does the script evolve over the development of the game?

We are in constant contact with Travis to ensure that he is continually updated on the game's progress and sees the work firsthand as soon as it is available for testing. He can then add in-game dialogues where necessary or think up one-liners which work in a given situation. The game design and the script are tightly integrated so we were really able to nail down the script relatively early in the process. At this stage it is all about fine tuning and making changes that comport with any changes/ additions/removals that we have made to the game itself.

Tell us about the Saber3D game engine. What are its strengths, and what have these strengths allowed you to do in the game?

The Saber3D Engine is a very powerful tool for game development that enables us to create visually stunning games that utilize the power of the latest graphics rendering hardware. We have also created a tremendous toolset that puts integration into the hands of our artists and designers. Our engine supports an impressive number of advanced rendering features including parallax mapping, normal mapping, detailed normal mapping, HDR, reflection (cube) mapping, realistic physics, realistic water, ambient occlusion lighting, spherical harmonics, dynamic lights and shadows, depth of field effects and a host of others. You will really see all of these features on display in the PC version of the game and the majority of them in the Xbox version. We are often asked why we are not using a third-party engine. The answer is simple. Using our own engine (which is on par with the best of them) not only guarantees unique visuals but also allows us to customize technology quickly for our game. Furthermore, our familiarity with our own tech makes development much quicker and the results much better than they would be with an off-the-shelf solution.

Thanks for your time!

Thank you! I really enjoyed answering your insightful questions. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: What we'd like to see: Pariah get the commercial recognition it deserves on release.

PARIAH

Available on **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-16** ■ Developer: **Digital Extremes** ■ Available: **Mid 2005**

The first time we saw gameplay footage of the upcoming FPS Pariah, we were, to be perfectly honest, a little underwhelmed. Actually, underwhelmed is a bit of an understatement, pretty damn unimpressed would be a little closer to the mark. From the footage, what we saw was a very average looking shooter taking every cue it could from Halo (drivable vehicles, level design, even the way the weapons looked) but failing to grasp any of the things that could have made it anything other than a pale knockoff. How wrong we were.

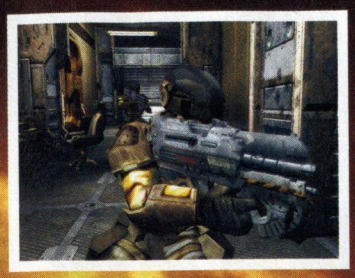
WE WERE WRONG - HOORAY!

We recently had a visit from THQ and got a chance to get our hands on code. Our first impressions, as they sometimes are, were almost painfully wrong. Instead of a pale, two-bit Halo clone, Pariah is shaping up to be one of the significant FPS releases of 2005. The code we played was assuredly paced, looked incredible (it's running on the latest Unreal engine), and above all else was great fun.

We know very little of the plot so far aside from the fact that you play a somewhat disgraced doctor, there's a strange prisoner with a virus that you, the protagonist are trailing and either trying to save or capture (perhaps a little of both) and that due to a rather unfortunate and badly thought out (for the characters) sequence of events that you may have the virus as well. Oh yeah, there's also some aliens in there too. Story aside, what makes Pariah look so promising are some of the little features. For a start, instead of having to find medpacks to heal, the player comes readily equipped with a healing tool that can be used at any time, as long as you have the ammunition for it. Speaking of ammunition, instead of specific ammunition types, all weapons (and items with charges such as the healing tool) instead use ammunition packs which will either restock your currently equipped weapon if it is low on ammo or, if you have a full load, will restock one of the other guns in your inventory.

Ammunition means nothing if the weapons are no fun to play with. Thankfully this is not the case. Although sticking quite firmly to the standard weapon assortment with an assault rifle, grenade launcher, sniper rifle, shotgun, rocket launcher and so on, Digital Extremes have added one neat little touch that make them feel quite fresh. Each weapon can be upgraded through the use of pickups. One token will give the first power-up, a further two will get you the second and a final three will get you the most powerful. Each weapon has three different power-ups. The grenade launcher, for example has power-ups to do extra damage by sucking in particles from around the blast radius before it explodes (a damn cool looking effect), a manual trigger allowing you to use the grenades like mines and finally it turns all of the grenades fired into sticky bombs, much like the plasma grenades from Halo. The Hyper crew can't wait to have a little deathmatch action using nothing but sticky grenades.

[above] Deathmatch rocket paanching



EACH WEAPON CAN BE UPGRADED THROUGH THE USE OF PICKUPS

[above] The Valley of the Jeep Beets

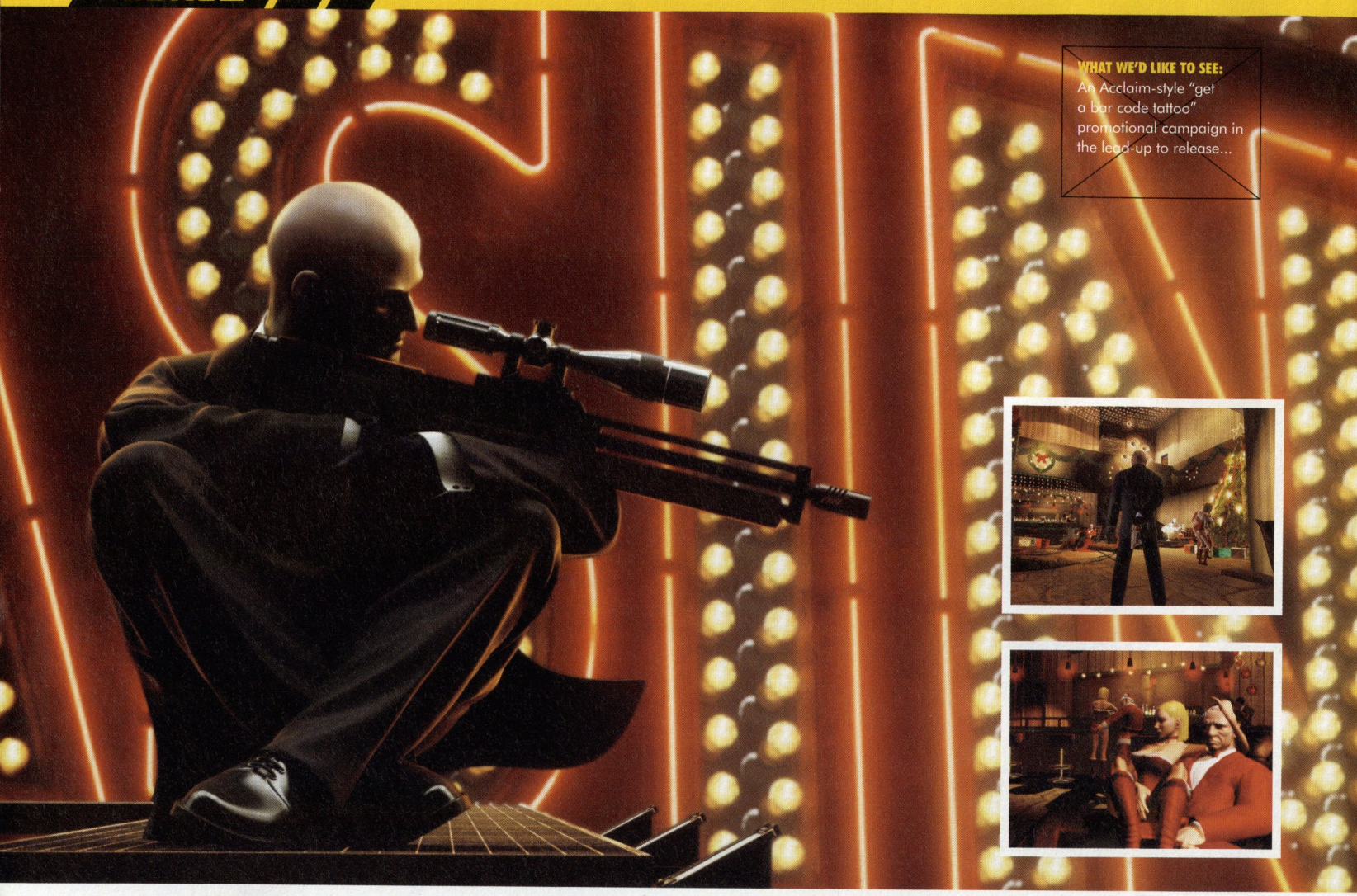
[up] Long range corrective laser surgery

ALL HAIL THE PHYSICS

There is one final factor that we think will put Pariah over the edge as far as popularity and longevity are concerned - Xbox Live. Pariah will come packing a fully featured multiplayer component available over Live but not only that, it features full bot support. That's right, there's a finally a multiplayer game for Xbox that features bots so you don't have to wait for some friends to come around or to find enough people on Live to have a play. As well as the bot support, Pariah will ship with a built in level editor allowing players to design their own multiplayer maps for all of the multiplayer modes. Each mode will have four maps to use as templates but due to the toolset there are very few changes that can't be made. Each of the map templates we've been told will be no larger than 64k so it will be possible to upload and download new maps without a hit on your bandwidth.

It also looks as though Digital Extremes has taken into account the popularity of physics experiments such as Warthog jumping, as one of the level design options is to make jumps for the various vehicles in the game. We've already formulated plans for a map featuring one very long straight, a jump and a number of explosive barrels (one of the numerous items you can add to maps) under where the vehicle will be jumping. Our theory is if you get a player shooting the barrels as the vehicle is going over them it should make for one spectacularly massive air. Only time, a little bit of effort and the obsessive tendencies of some people in the office, will tell. <<

VROOM So far we have seen three of the vehicles that will appear in Pariah - a four-wheel drive ATV with mounted machinegun and gun emplacement rocket launchers, a zippy little single person hovercraft and a natty looking reverse trike (two wheels at the front and one at the back). Control wise all of the vehicles drive using fairly standard FPS controls so you need to use both thumbsticks for control. It takes a little getting used to but after the first few moments of driving around in circles, failing to run down any of the enemies milling around and crashing into the walls until you explode (as Wilks so style-lessly demonstrated) you'll be hooning around in no time (unless you're Wilks).



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
An Acclaim-style "get a bar code tattoo" promotional campaign in the lead-up to release...

HITMAN: Blood Money

Available on **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Assassim** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Io Interactive** ■ Available: **Late 2005**

There's an old saying that goes, "you can't keep a good man down". Whilst this may be true it is also a fact that you can't keep a bad man down either. Enter Agent 47, the bald, bar coded anti-hero (or villain depending on your point of view) of Io's successful Hitman franchise. He's coming back in 2005 and he's got a few scores to settle as well as a lot of dirty lucre to make. The premise for Hitman: Blood Money is the most compelling one to date - agents from the ICA, the agency for which 47 works, are targeted in a number of systematic hits and it becomes obvious to all involved that a larger, even more clandestine agency is horning in on the racket. Being a stone cold killer with a heart of... erm... stone, 47 goes about his business as usual. Business as usual that is until he loses contact with the ICA and correctly surmises that he may be the next target to be bumped off. What is any good professional killer to do in a situation like this? Why, travel to America and set up shop selling your services to the highest bidder of course.

DIRTY LUCRE

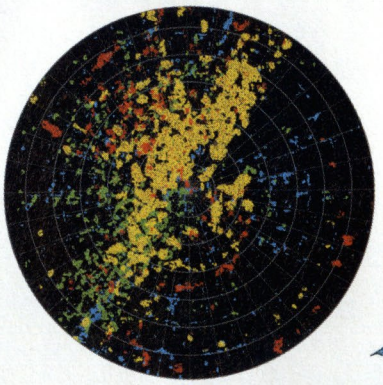
The new more mercenary nature of Agent 47 is one of the core ideas that will drive the action of Blood Money. Earning and spending money is up to the individual player. From what we understand, all of the money earned in the game will be used to buy equipment and weapons, as well as pay bribes and the like. Weapons, the bread and butter of the hitman come in two flavours in Blood Money - special weapons and general weapons. Special Weapons are the personal weapons of Agent 47 such as the garrotte and the player will be able to configure and customise these to suit their play style. General weapons will be available to buy throughout the game. We have no details on them as yet be we have been assured that there will be a hell of a lot of them and how they are used for assassinations will effect the course of the game.

Throughout the course of the missions players will gain the opportunity to upgrade their weapons. Certain weapons will need preliminary upgrades before they can be fully upgraded - a sniper rifle may need a longer rail mount for a more powerful scope, for instance. Other upgrades will be non-compatible so if you want to use high velocity ammunition in said sniper rifle you won't be able to use a silencer and vice versa.

The game will utilise a new version of the proprietary Glacier engine and as you can see from the screens it looks pretty damn sweet. We've also been told that the physics engine will include Rigid Body dynamics which should eliminate some of the stranger looking ragdoll poses during death. Stay tuned for more bloody Hitman info.

[up] Not so jolly now, are ya Santa?

Not only do you get to work on a multi-million dollar radar system, but we'll pay you $43,000 to do it.



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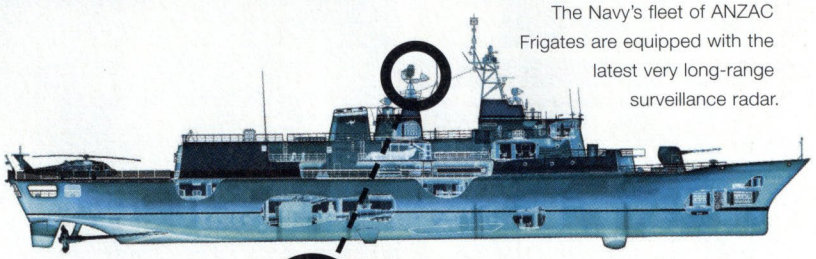

The Navy's fleet of ANZAC Frigates are equipped with the latest very long-range surveillance radar.

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WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
A storyline that's as compelling as the action and setting.

COLD FEAR

Available on **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Survival Horror** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Darkworks** ■ Available: **March/April**

» It's a difficult time to be a survival horror game right now. RE4 has been met with almost universal praise, and fans are surely too distracted by Leon-poo's latest antics to pay much attention to other titles hitting the shelves. But then, that might be a mistake, because Cold Fear is shaping up to be pretty damn good.

BUT WHO WILL POLICE THE POLICE?

Set out on the rough seas of the Arctic, you play as a US Coast Guard crewman who's sent to check out an abandoned Russian whaling ship, and it soon becomes clear that something horrific has happened onboard. Mind you, uncovering the mystery behind the mountains of dead bodies and erm, not so dead bodies, is only part of what will make this game special.

It's the setting, you see, that brings so much character to the experience. The ship is a truly hostile environment, pummeled on all sides by ferociously stormy seas. Even making your way across the deck is fraught with danger. Driving rain and wind batters you as you stagger along, forcing you to hold your hand up to your face in order to see ahead. Huge waves slam against the side of the ship, sending torrents of water lashing over the side. The ship is pitching about wildly, threatening to knock you off your feet and sweep you overboard. Even cargo on the end of a crane's cable is swinging about dangerously - you walk under it and you'll get clobbered (and fortunately this goes for the "exocels" too). All this before you even get inside. You know a game's good when the undead are almost a relief.

The lurching of the ship and the intensity of the rain act as a wonderful counterpoint to the claustrophobic rooms and corridors inside. And that's the beauty of Cold Fear - there's nowhere to run. You're pinned in on all sides, with no choice but to work out what the hell is going on.

The gameplay seems to be a pretty good mix too. Sure, there's the usual survival horror fare - documents to read, levers to pull, an automated camera system and the "walk around the walls to make sure you don't miss something you can interact with" phenomenon, but it's also tied in with robust combat mechanics. Drawing your gun sees the viewpoint move to over the shoulder and a more traditional FPS control scheme. It means you can strafe and aim quickly, and smoothly go for headshots, which result in a gratifyingly over the top explosion of gore. It's also invaluable for getting a good look at your surroundings, and peeking around corners. In fact, you'll probably spend about half the game in this viewpoint.

You may not have to rescue the President's daughter, but Cold Fear could be one of the sleeper hits of the year. Full review next issue. <<

[above] It's the President's daughter!

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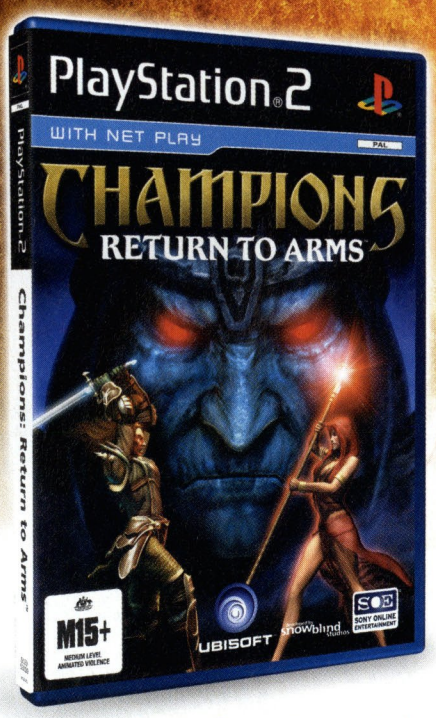

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[above] If you've ever wanted to "ride" Yoshi, this course is as close as you'll get

MARIO KART DS

Available on **Nintendo DS** ■ Category: **Kart Racing** ■ Players: **1-8** ■ Developer: **Nintendo** ■ Available: **Soon**

After changing things up somewhat with Double Dash!!, Nintendo are going back to slightly safer territory for Mario Kart DS. Gone are the two mascots to a kart antics, with a more familiar looking game in its stead. Familiar, we should say, for Nintendo 64 owners, as Mario Kart DS bears more in common with the classic 64bit edition than the GBA game - the characters and courses are fully polygonal, and mode 7 is out the window.

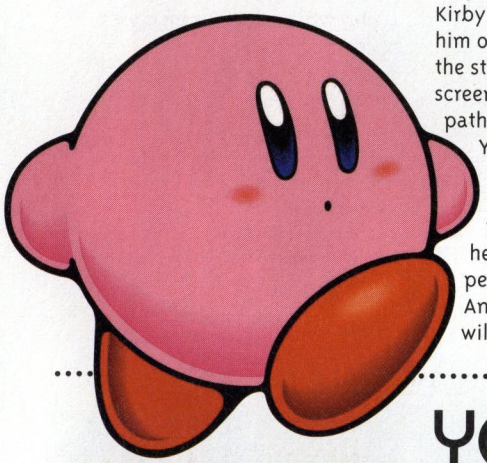
Racing takes place on the top screen, whilst the bottom can be used for a top down view of the action (where you can also see what powerups/items other characters are carrying) or for a more traditional course outline and leaderboard. We presume that Nintendo will also incorporate some kind of touch screen steering method, like in Ridge Racer 64, and although hardly essential, it should make hopping about the courses quite interesting.

It's a good looking game too, and characters zip around the turns as you'd expect, but the real drawcard for Mario Kart DS is going to be the wireless multiplayer. Up to eight players can connect for lag free racing sessions, which could well make this game one of the best multiplayer titles ever.

TOUCH! KIRBY'S MAGIC PAINTBRUSH

Available on **Nintendo DS** ■ Category: **Platformer** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **HAL Labs** ■ Available: **TBA**

Kirby is one of those Nintendo characters that can't really hold his blobby head too high. Sure, he's been in some solid titles, but he's also been in some complete tripe. Thankfully, with Kirby's Magic Paintbrush, it looks like things might finally be going his way.

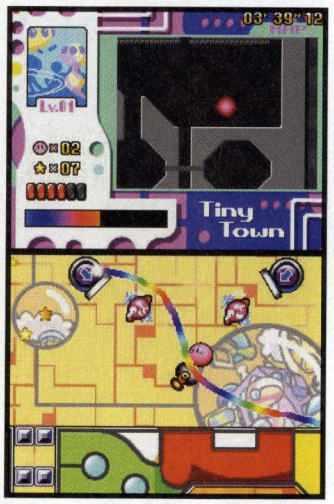


Looking much like an old school 2D platformer, you must guide Kirby along his merry way, keeping him out of harm's way by using the stylus to literally paint lines on screen that will act as makeshift paths for the little fellow to follow. You don't have unlimited paint at your disposal, although it does regenerate, and if you make the gradient too steep he'll roll back the other way, so penmanship will be important. And we can imagine that there will be secrets galore to be discovered by getting Kirby to difficult to reach spots.

Of course, it's not all about avoiding trouble - Kirby can attack enemies he comes across, with offensive moves activated by "tapping the pink" so to speak. Hopefully you'll be able to consume enemies and use their attacks, as is Kirby's standard modus operandi.

It may not look like much, but Kirby's Magic Paintbrush is set to be a very charming and clever little game that makes good use of the Nintendo DS touch screen.

[left] Kirby - soon to appear on Celebrity Overhaul



YOSHI'S TOUCH AND GO

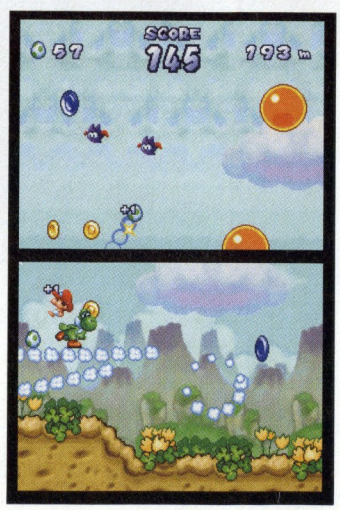
Available on **Nintendo DS** ■ Category: **Platformer** ■ Players: **1-2** ■ Developer: **Nintendo** ■ Available: **TBA**

[above] Touch Yoshi twice and he flutters... is it just us or is that a bit sick?

One of the best tech demos of the DS technology from last year's E3 is becoming an entire game. You may remember it - baby Mario was falling through the sky and it was up to you to draw lines of cloud on the lower screen to guide him away from enemies and keep him safe. It was a novel concept and lots of fun. Definitely worthy of a game.

But where does the Yoshi part come in? I'm glad you asked. In addition to the vertically scrolling levels are side scrolling areas which bear more in common with a traditional platform game, and indeed with Yoshi's Island. Yoshi runs along with baby Mario on his back (apparently Kammy Koopa and baby Luigi will also be in the game - although they may only be for two player mode) and players are charged with using the stylus to shoot eggs at enemies, draw paths and touch Yoshi to make him jump and flutter jump. You can also encircle enemies with the stylus to turn them into coins then shoot an egg to collect them.

Given that Yoshi's Island is probably our favourite 2D platform game, returning to this setting, along with the new gameplay dynamic that two screens and touch functionality bring, has us frothing at the mouth. This is going to be a must-have DS title.



APE ACADEMY

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **Party game** ■ Players: **1-4** ■ Developer: **Sony** ■ Available: **TBA**

[up] What would Freud think of this?

Here's the Hollywood style pitch: "It's like Police Academy, except instead of police school, it's school school, and instead of Steve Guttenburg, there's a monkey. Okay, so there's not much difference there." Yes, in Ape Academy you'll be attending monkey school, and competing against classmates in all manner of zany mini-games in order to graduate. It's a thinly veiled excuse for the 50 mini-games certainly, but it contains monkeys and monkey antics, so we're happy.

As you've no doubt gathered, the usual platform gameplay is out the window for this entry in the Ape Escape franchise, to be replaced with some really addictive looking mini-games. From monkey boxing and timing games through to slightly odder inclusions like deflecting arrows and giving out flowers, there's a gratifying level of polish on all the games we've seen so far.

Of the 50 mini-games, from what we understand only five of these will be playable against a friend via WiFi. What does sound cool though, is that there will be collectables at stake when playing multiplayer. When you set up a multiplayer game, each player will have to bet with monkey figures unlocked in other modes, and as they say, to the winner go the spoils. There are also 13 mini-games that are designed to be played by two players simultaneously on one PSP. You know the drill, turn it side on and hold an end each. Need anyone say "pants tres bien"?

FIRED UP

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **Vehicle combat** ■ Players: **1-8** ■ Developer: **SCEE London** ■ Available: **TBA**

Inserting plots into games where you drive around blowing as much stuff up as possible has always been a tenuous proposition, but developers are always willing to try it on. The latest shot at the crown is Fired Up, a game in which "the player controls a team of cool and quirky vehicle combat specialists who find themselves fighting the invasion of a totalitarian superpower in a small eastern European country."

Totalitarian superpower eh? I think a few rockets up the date would sort that situation out! Sarcasm aside, Fired Up is actually looking very promising. The story mode takes place across wide, open landscapes with a whole host of styles of mission objectives and arcadey mini-challenges. There are a number of team members to play with, each with their own customised vehicles.

And then there's the wireless multiplayer for up to 8 people, spanning 12 maps and 8 game modes. Think Hardware: Online Arena on PS2 (which, incidentally is the last game much of the SCEE London team worked on) and you'd have a good idea what to expect... shooting shit up. In a totalitarian state.

Do SCEEL have the skills? We'll find out soon enough...

FORMULA ONE

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **F1 racing** ■ Players: **1-8** ■ Developer: **Traveller's Tales** ■ Available: **May**

Wow! This one wasn't really even on our mildly interested radar until we saw it running recently. And I'll say it again - wow. Sure, it's pretty much a standard Formula 1 racer, and sure, it's really not doing anything that other F1 games haven't already done, but seeing it all happening on a handheld is very impressive. The detail just leaps out at you and the speed is nothing less than intense.

Interestingly, this game is being developed entirely from scratch, as opposed to being ported from the PS2 version. Formula One will be right up to date for the 2005 season too, and will even include the new Turkish circuit. Better still, you'll even be able to download actual grid lineups and qualifying times as the actual events happen in the 2005 season. If the PSP is out here by then that is.

The emphasis will definitely be on allowing you to play in short bursts, so in addition to all the sim elements you'd expect, there will also be arcade modes. Another cool addition is Scenario Mode, where you can re-race classic Formula One moments.

THE BEST GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

RETRO

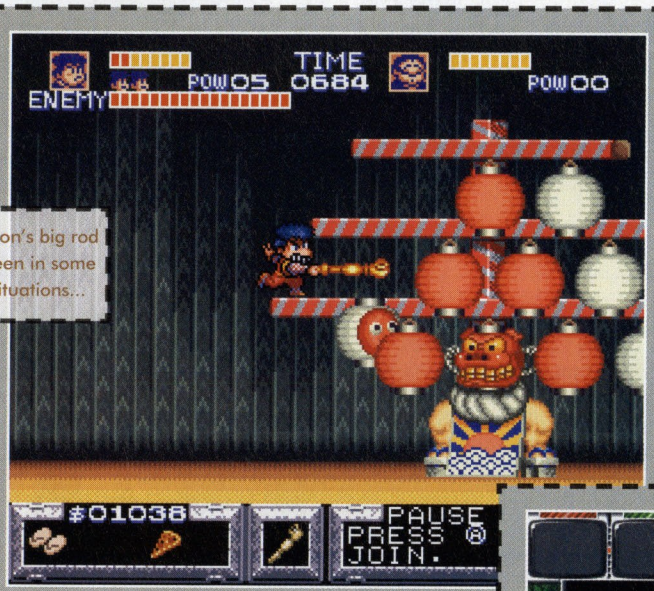
This feature is a celebration of the great titles that slipped under the radars of most people, whether they were impossible to get, didn't sell, or just weren't publicised well. If you haven't played these titles, track 'em down. If you have, we hope you agree they deserve a more prominent place in gaming history. For the purpose of the first four pages we've defined retro as anything before the 3D revolution. Enjoy!

I think he likes her. I think he really likes her...

Doriath

Platform: **Commodore 64**
Developer: **Virgin**
Year: **1987**

There are some games out there that cause people to become what could mildly be described as obsessed. Doriath is one such game. Combining elements of action RPG, exploration and puzzle solving, Doriath saw players trying to guide their character through an epic dungeon collecting various items that will help them on their way. The concept may sound simple and it is - on paper. In reality the game is ridiculously addictive and devilishly hard, giving rise to rumours at the time of release that it was actually impossible to complete. Whilst it is possible to complete, some people have been playing for over a decade to try and crack the last few rooms in the dungeon.



Goemon's big rod has been in some tight situations...

Legend of the Mystical Ninja

Platform: **SNES**
Developer: **Konami**
Year: **1991**

Part platformer, part RPG, part collection of mini-games, Legend of the Mystical Ninja is one of the greatest games based on an anime license ever. Playing as Gabane Goemon (kind of like Japan's ninja Robin Hood) or his friend Ebisumaru (or both in two player co-op), gamers were treated to brilliant platforming action as well as an abundance of real Japanese mythology being used as the basis for events, levels and monsters. Aside from side scrolling action and the ability to buy numerous upgrades and new weapons, LotMN contained a wealth of mini-games including a Breakout clone, whack-a-mole, various forms of gambling and even the ability to play the first level of Gradius! Unfortunately the three sequels never actually made it to our shores so the Mystical Ninja has remained a legend.

Captive

Platform: **Amiga 500**
Developer: **Mindscape Inc.**
Year: **1990**

Like a paranoid fever dream, Captive is a game all about isolation and (literally) finding yourself. Players wake in a prison with no idea where they are, who they are or what they did to be incarcerated. Aside from yourself the only thing in the room is a briefcase computer that gives you control over four droids, all of which need to be used to find out where you are and free you. Similar to Eye of the Beholder in many aspects, Captive is a sci-fi themed RPG with a few novel twists (aside from the great narrative) that elevates it above the rest of the pack such as instead of levelling like in a standard RPG, players must buy upgrades and new parts to improve their performance.

And what is our defense budget spent on exactly?

Infiltrator

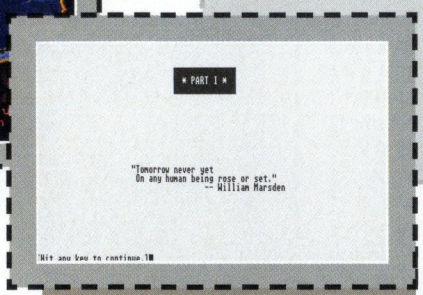
Platform: **NES/C64**
Developer: **Chris Gray Enterprises**
Year: **1986**

The combination of helicopter sim and third person stealth/espionage game may sound pretty cool but when you take into account the fact that the main character's name is Johnny McGibbitts (probably the least tough tough-guy name since Huggy Fuzzlebear tried to take on the mob in the unreleased "Huggy Fuzzlebear Takes On the Mob") it becomes positively inspired. Subterfuge played a huge role in Infiltrator - it was possible to convince enemy helicopters you were on their side and false documents could allow you to pass unnoticed in enemy camps. Failing that, machine guns, sleeping gas and grenades could be used to make sure that suspicious guards or copters couldn't tell anyone else their doubts about your identity.

Veil of Darkness

Platform: **PC**
Developer: **SSI**
Year: **1993**

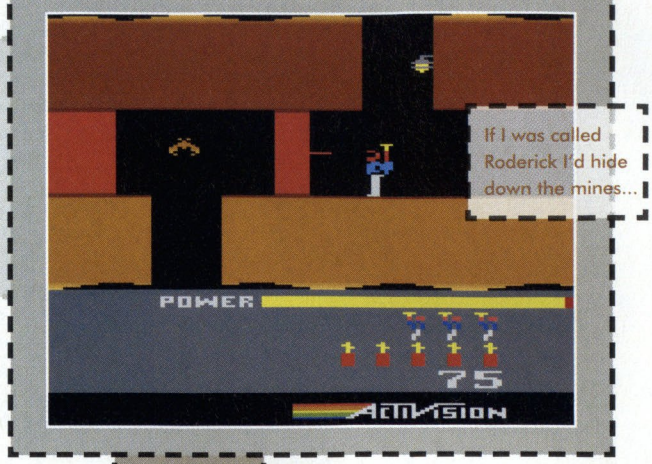
Veil of Darkness is like the template for many of the action RPG games we have around today. Set in a murky Romanian valley cut off from the rest of the world by an evil Vampire, Kairn (not one of those pussy soul having guys), players take the role of a cargo pilot who crashes there, his fiery descent the first part of a prophecy marking him as the hero that will eventually kill the vampire and free the valley. Gameplay combines elements of hack and slash action RPG and some devilishly clever puzzles, each of which needs to be solved to further the prophecy, each one bringing you a step closer to the inevitable confrontation with Kairn.



A Mind Forever Voyaging

Platform: **Apple II**
Developer: **Infocom**
Year: **1985**

Infocom may be famous for their text adventures but A Mind Forever Voyaging is always overlooked when talking about the classics. A huge departure from the norm, AMFV casts players as the first sentient computer in the world. In the near future (2031) the American economy and way of life is on the verge of collapse. The government comes up with a revolutionary new set of policies combining 50s ideals and 21st century technology. As the only "person" in the world capable of travelling into a theoretical future to test the policies it's up to the player to explore the world of tomorrow to see if the new initiative will improve the American lot or whether it will push them further into oblivion. This is the Brave New World or 1984 of the computer game world.



If I was called Roderick I'd hide down the mines...

H.E.R.O.

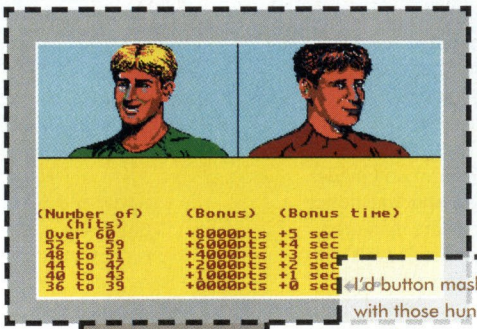
Platform: **Atari 2600**
Developer: **Activision**
Year: **1984**

Roderick Hero is perhaps the greatest name ever. The name alone means that H.E.R.O. deserves a place on any best of list but when it's combined with clever and addictive gameplay the result is spectacular. Miners are trapped and it's up to Roderick to save them via strategic use of his jet-pack, helmet lasers and six sticks of dynamite. Players guide Roderick through mine shafts to rescue trapped miners using his jet-pack to hover, helmet lasers to destroy bats and other beasties that get in the way and dynamite to blow up obstacles that prevent him from getting to the trapped miners. If you search hard enough you can find H.E.R.O. for GBA. Get it and you'll be hooked.

Exile

Platform: **BBC Micro**
Developer: **Acornsoft**
Year: **1998**

This game was Metroid before Metroid was Metroid. Playing as Mike Finn, a space adventurer, players had to explore a truly vast network of caves and passages combating some devious enemies and even more devious puzzles. Spectacularly, Exile featured a fully implemented physics engine for all characters and particles as well as utilising it in a number of puzzles years before Half-Life 2 was ever an idea and Gabe was but a slip of a man (maybe). Much Like Elite, Exile was truly staggering in size and the game box contained a novella fleshing out the back-story and universe to add further richness to an already sweet game.



I'd button mash with those hunks any day

Boot Camp

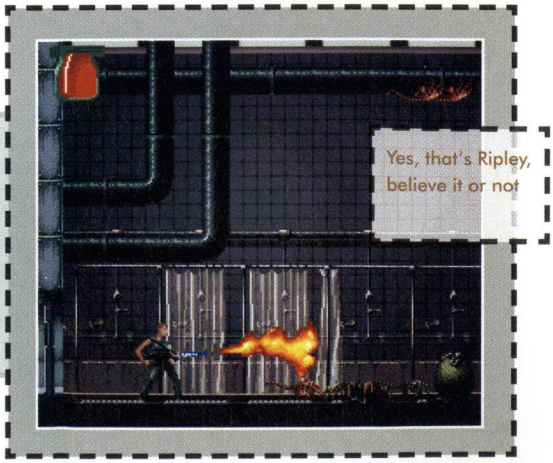
Platform: **C64**
Developer: **Banana Development**
Year: **1987**

Looking back now Boot Camp seems more than a little fruity and definitely pretty camp. Boot Camp is, at heart, a sports game wrapped in the guise of a military training game. To graduate from Boot Camp (and presumably be sent to the front lines where they will be hideously disfigured by mines and be sent home only to face scorn for being baby killers) players need to compete in (and win) a number of sweet button mashing events such as obstacle courses, arm wrestling, iron man and even a fight with your instructor. Boot Camp also featured great head to head fruity military sports action so you could arm wrestle your friends until the cows came home without the icky prospect of actually having to touch their sweaty palms.

Alien 3

Platform: **SNES**
Developer: **Probe**
Year: **1993**

When you get over the fact that in the movie Alien 3 Ripley only fought one alien, Alien 3 the game turns out to be one of the best side scrolling shooters around. Armed with the iconic Pulse Rifle/Flamethrower combo from Aliens (which did not appear in Alien 3) Ripley makes her way through the abandoned facility (none of the characters from the movie appear) killing seven varieties of Aliens (once again not from the movie). Whilst the game has little to do with the movie it is licensed from, aside from name and Ripley, Alien 3 is a tight and atmospheric ride filled with great levels and monsters, not to mention one of the coolest movie weapons ever.



Yes, that's Ripley, believe it or not

Terranigma

Platform: **SNES**
Developer: **Quintet**
Year: **1996**

Take a good side of Zelda and simmer it in Final Fantasy and you have some idea of what to expect from Terranigma, a fast paced and strangely depressing action game with RPG elements. Players take the role of Ark, a kid who literally opens Pandora's Box (by any other name) and is forced to redress the balance of the universe when everyone in his home town is turned to stone. With clever and addictive real time combat, a nifty amount of items to find and use and an excellent soundtrack, Terranigma still remains a very playable game despite its unerringly linear nature.

Radiant Silvergun

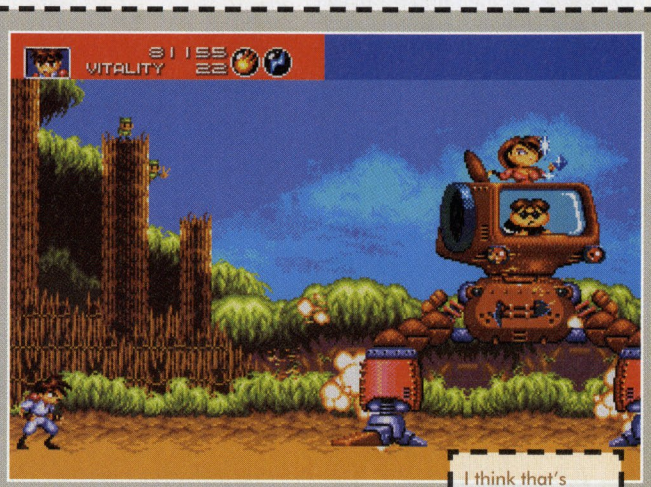
Platform: **Sega Saturn**
Developer: **Treasure**
Year: **1998**

As far as scrolling shooters go there are few as damn good as Radiant Silvergun. Ever. Treasure, at the time of release were better known for their platform games but Silvergun changed all that and for good reason. Players flew the most powerful ship in the galaxy, the Radiant Silvergun, to combat all manner of deadly space enemies. Unlike most conventional shooters, Silvergun veered away from the weapon pickup mold and instead opted for giving the player access to three weapons on three different controller buttons, each of which levelled up RPG style after completing the game. It also showed the world just how damn impressive games on the Saturn could look.

Gunstar Heroes

Platform: **Sega Genesis**
Developer: **Treasure**
Year: **1993**

Treasure were a brilliant developer, as evidenced by the fact that four of their games appear in this feature. Much like Contra, Gunstar Heroes was a side scrolling shooter but all similarities (no matter how good Contra was) end there. Gunstar Heroes was without a doubt, the pinnacle of white-knuckle twitch based action. The game was also graphically intensive and made gamers stand up and take notice as somehow Treasure managed to make the humble Genesis pump its large and colourful sprites with a vigour never before seen on the Sega console.

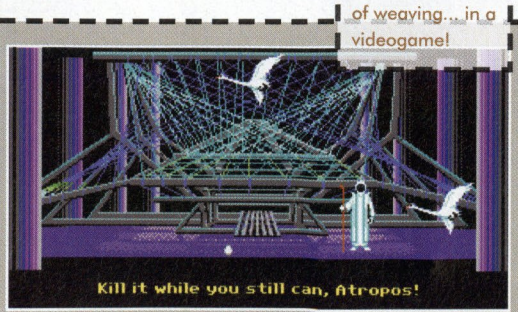


I think that's Amos behind the controls!

Loom

Platform: **Amiga**
Developer: **LucasArts**
Year: **1990**

The integration of sound and gameplay is what made Loom so special. Players took the role of Bobbin Threadbare (cool name huh?), a young apprentice to the Guild of Weavers, the magic users of the game world. After overhearing a conversation not for his tender ears, Bobbin sets off on adventure, weaving music based magic as he goes. Spell casting and puzzle solving is what made Loom so unique in approach - everything was done through notes that the players had to listen to, store in their notebook and play back. Each puzzle could be solved with a specific tune learnt from different characters or objects in the game.



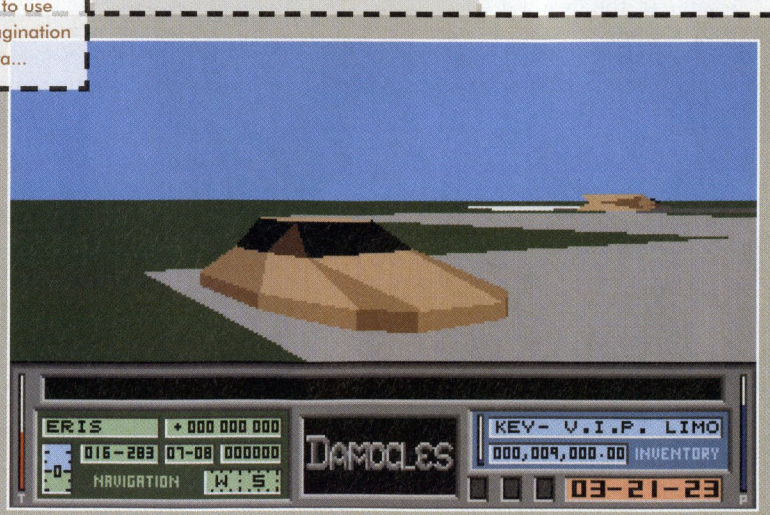
The excitement of weaving... in a videogame!

Damocles

Platform: **Amiga**
Developer: **Novagen**
Year: **1990**

The sequel to the equally superb Mercenary on the C64 (1986), Damocles is one of the most frustratingly brilliant, huge and nerve-wracking games ever created. Players take the role of an interplanetary mercenary, helped (and hindered in turn) by a cheerful computer named Benson. Whilst the life of a mercenary used to be all about making the phat dollar dollar bills y'all there is now one slight problem - a massive comet named Damocles is heading straight for your planet Eris, and it's up to you to stop it. No simple feat, stopping the comet requires the player to explore hundreds of locations over 28 planets and moons in any sequence the player desires - just make sure you do it within the time limit.

You had to use your imagination in this era...



The third brother "Mofo" wasn't included...

Bonanza Bros

Platform: **Arcade**
Developer: **Sega**
Year: **1991**

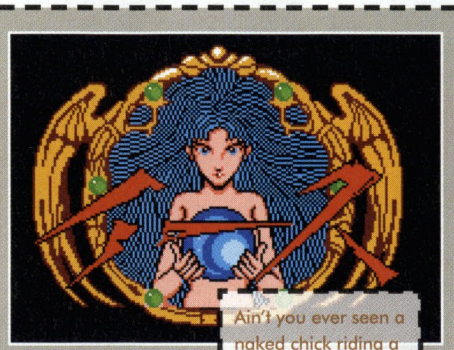
Mobo and Robo Bonanza are two professional thieves hired by a mysterious benefactor to test his security system by stealing a number of items from different buildings within a set time limit. Each of the levels was filled with traps and guards which could either be avoided through stealth or attacked head on. In many ways Bonanza Bros was ahead of its time and set many precedents for the stealth games of today including lines of sight, hiding behind objects and the like. Foresightedness aside, Bonanza Bros also was one other thing that warrants inclusion on this list - it was incredibly (and addictively) fun.

Super Happy Double Testicular Stomp Ahoy!

Waku Waku 7

Platform: **Sega Saturn/Neo Geo**
Developer: **Sunsoft**
Year: **1996**

Excellent fighting mechanics were common in the mid to late 90s but too many fighting games had clichéd and dull characters. There's only so many times you can see Ken and Ryu cloned before you get a little jaded. Waku Waku 7 is the cure for such jadedness. Sure, it has a serious martial artist Ryu clone as a character but he's anything but common. He's a cranky punching bag (literally) without limbs. The big boss, Fernandeath was a cranky non-Hispanic (despite the name) bowling ball thing with wings and a special called the "Double Testicular Stomp". The token fat slow but heavy hitting guy was a giant rabbit thing ridden by a little girl. It even included a character made up of a midget police inspector and his police costumed dog riding a giant mech. Brilliant fighting insanity.



Ain't you ever seen a naked chick riding a clam before?

Ys

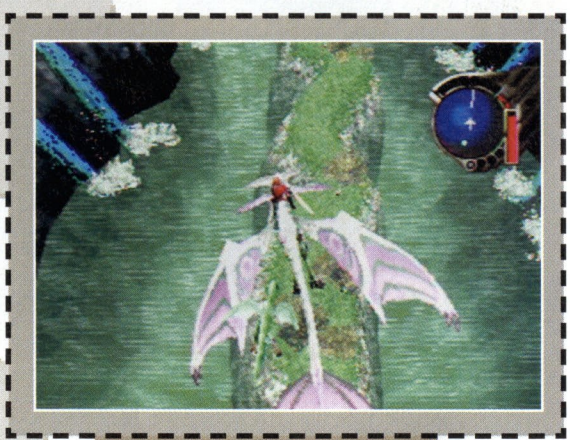
Platform: **NES**
Developer: **Nihon Falcom Japan**
Year: **1988**

It's a pity that both Ys and Zelda appeared on the NES because the latter greatly overshadowed the former. Ys was easily as good as the better known series, though it had a more action oriented slant. As the red headed hero players fought their way across the countryside hacking, slashing and spell casting at any foe that got in their way to collect the Six Books of Ys, stolen by an evil wizard called Malificus. Honestly, if you call your kid Malificus you know he has no choice but to turn out bad. While writing this we received preview code of a new Ys game for PS2 that has Daniel licking his chops in anticipation. Stay tuned.

Shadowrun

Platform: **SNES**
Developer: **Beam Software**
Year: **1993**

Based on the FASA pen and paper RPG of the same name, Shadowrun was the great action RPG of the early 90s. After a strange sequence of events that includes a dog who is a woman and waking up in a morgue with amnesia (isn't that always the way) the player must uncover what is going on and kill a hell of a lot of people. Aside from levelling up RPG style, players could also buy skills from vendors in the form of cybernetics, as well as hire specialised NPC party members for tasks such as hacking and the like. Combat was simple, maybe excessively so but still managed to be fun and not get in the way of the excellent atmosphere and cleverly unravelling plot.



Panzer Dragoon Saga

Platform: **Sega Saturn**
Developer: **Team Andromeda**
Year: **1998**

Though better known as a series of beautiful rails shooters, Panzer Dragoon Saga, the second Panzer Dragoon game took the game in a whole new direction and made it a fully fledged and brilliantly realised RPG combining elements of both on foot RPG exploration and thrilling real-time dragon based combat. The dragon combat was really the high point of the game, not to say that anything else on offer was less than excellent. Played out in real-time the combat utilised a strategic action system that used three power gauges to show the player what abilities were available. When the dragon levelled instead of simply becoming more powerful it gained the ability to morph into other dragons with different sets of skills. Please bring on a sequel.

THE BEST MODERN GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

And now, on to the modern era, and the veritable treasure trove of great games which either didn't make it to Oz or simply weren't bought. For the sake of this article we're defining the modern era as "from the advent of 3Dfx cards on PC and from the PlayStation onwards on console."

The first time many Japanese gamers held hands with a girl

ICO

Platform: **PS2**
Developer: **SCEJ**
Year: **2001**

ICO was a title that achieved amazing critical success, but very limited commercial recognition. Damn shame too because it's a game that straddled genres, and brought new sensibilities to the gaming experience. In it you must guide a young boy named Ico out of an eerily huge labyrinthine fortress, whilst rescuing an otherworldly girl named Yorda, all whilst fighting off the shadow demons that are intent on taking and imprisoning her. You can't directly control or communicate with Yorda either. Instead, you'll grab her hand to lead her, you'll climb ropes and pull her up onto ledges. There's almost no dialogue, with the sense of touch playing a vital role as Ico and Yorda traverse through the vast spaces.

ICO was a triumph of nuance and atmosphere. Despite the lack of overt story, it was a strangely touching and dream-like experience, with boundless character built into the animations and setting.

No really, it's not like Space Harrier...

Sin and Punishment: Successor to the Earth

Platform: **Nintendo 64**
Developer: **Treasure**
Year: **2000**

A collaboration between acclaimed shooter development house Treasure and Nintendo's R&D1 team, it's a damn shame we never got this one out here. Sin and Punishment is essentially a much more involved and varied version of Space Harrier. Rather than a jetpack, you're tied to the ground but can move and commando roll left and right and even jump over incoming attacks. Yes, it's on rails, but the pacing and variety in enemies, not to mention the steadily increasing difficulty and great points system makes for a sublime game.

Although suffering from severely low poly count characters and the blurring that was part and parcel of many N64 titles, it's also very pretty in its own way, often displaying huge bosses, swarms of enemies and earth-shattering explosions on-screen at once. And who could hate a game with mutated animal adversaries known as Ruffians?

Sega Gaga

Platform: **Sega Dreamcast**
Developer: **Hitmaker**
Year: **2001**

Sega Gaga would have to be the oddest game in our list of forgotten gems but it would also have to be the most inspired. The game, which was only released in Japan, sees players taking the role of the new CEO of Sega (some 25 years in the future) and charges them with inspiring the staff, hiring and firing, defending them from attack and trying to take over the (gaming) world via market dominance. Part management sim, part RPG, part puzzle game and part something uniquely Japanese, Sega Gaga is a brilliant play if A) you can read Japanese or B) if you can find one of the incredibly rare subtitled copies.

People who didn't buy this need a firmware upgrade

Tron 2.0

Platform: **PC**
Developer: **Monolith**
Year: **2003**

The lack of marketing given to Tron 2.0 is a crime as it caused a huge number of people to overlook one of the best FPS games of the last couple of years, which also has the honour of being one of the best games based on a movie license ever. Set 20 years after the famous Disney film, Tron 2.0 sees the son of the Alan Bradley, the scientist originally transported into the digital world, having to fight computer corruption from the inside utilising a mixture of FPS mechanics, RPG skill development and, of course, light cycle racing.

Disgaea

Platform: **PS2**
Developer: **Nippon Ichi**
Year: **2003**

You can be forgiven for not having played one of the great strategy games of recent years due to the fact that there only seemed to be about a dozen copies of the game available locally, all of which disappeared as soon as they hit shelves (damn you person who grabbed my copy before I could reach it - you know who you are). Not only is the gameplay wonderfully deep and strategically inclined, Disgaea features some fantastic art, a great story in which you play a villain, and a biting sense of humour that was often laugh out loud funny.

Ogre Battle 64: Person of Lordly Caliber

Platform: **N64**
Developer: **Quest**
Year: **2000**

If there was one style of game that the N64 was desperately missing, it was the RPG. Sure, there were two great Zelda games released for the system, but aside from that, what else is there? In this country, nothing much. But those lucky yanks (and importers) got their hands on a little gem called Ogre Battle 64. Part of the long running series, Ogre Battle 64 offered a very different play experience to Zelda. It was much more strategy orientated, with isometric semi turn-based battles where the player controlled multiple units of up to five characters, altering their positioning in a 3x3 grid then sending them into battle. Actual control was limited, but the mechanics were incredibly rewarding nonetheless. With heaps of characters (including a selection of monsters that could join your party), well over 50 classes and countless customisation options, Ogre Battle 64 was one deep RPG.

F-Zero X expansion kit

Platform: **64DD**
Developer: **Nintendo**
Year: **2000**

F-Zero X was a fantastic 3D adaptation of the SNES classic for the N64. Although some said it looked too sparse, it ran at 60fps through wild rollercoaster courses and the speed was so intense that this entirely negated the lack of detailed textures. Inevitably, however, after countless hours, you found yourself wanting something more, and that's where the 64DD expansion pack came in. Sure, the 64DD never saw the light of day outside of Japan, and sure the hardware add-on bombed there, but for a brief shining moment, this was the highlight of the 64DD's existence.

To kick things off, there were 12 new courses, but the real appeal lay in the track and vehicle editor. You could create some absolutely wild courses, and it was all really straightforward to use too - truly one of the most user-friendly console track editors up until that point.

Turnip was almost as cool as Slippy the frog

Chrono Cross

Platform: **PSone**
Developer: **Square**
Year: **1999**

Like their games or not, there is little doubt that the designers and developers at Square are artists. Chrono Cross, the sequel to the critically acclaimed Chrono Trigger wove a heartbreakingly brilliant story about a silent hero travelling between time periods to repair the damage he did in the previous game. Unlike most modern Square titles, Chrono Cross relied less on frequent conversations and more on actual plot development. Also unlike the majority of modern Square titles, Chrono Cross has a cast of almost 40 NPC characters that you could get to join your party. Unfortunately Chrono Cross was never given a PAL release so if you want to play it you'll have to find an NTSC copy on Ebay.

You bought Enter the Matrix, but not this?

Sacrifice

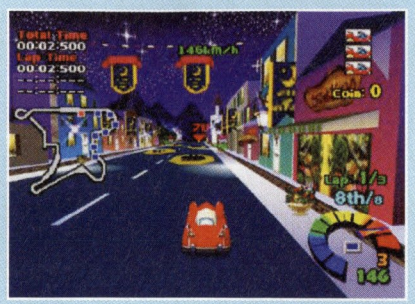
Platform: **PC**
Developer: **Shiny**
Year: **2000**

Games that we thought looked great at the time of release often look pretty damn terrible a year later. Sacrifice, on the other hand, still looks great four years on thanks to the unique design and fantastic use of colour. Players take the role of a wizard chosen by the gods to be a champion. Though a fairly traditional RTS at heart, Sacrifice puts the emphasis on action by having the player always controlling the wizard and fighting with them much like in a third person action game. Sacrifice also featured a remarkably dynamic storyline that changed depending on which god the player aligned with making for some extreme replayability.

Vagrant Story

Platform: **PSone**
Developer: **Square**
Year: **2000**

One of the most underrated RPGs on the PSone, Vagrant Story was a triumphant change of pace for Square. The move to real-time combat and the highly stylised, almost noir-ish design came as a breath of fresh air. Throw in great characters, an awesome item creation system and a weapon system where you could customise different weapons for different monsters, and you have the makings of one hell of a game. The icing on the cake though, was the politically charged story. Although convoluted and quite baffling in some parts, it was outstanding. Better still, it was backed up by one of the best Japanese to English translations ever.



Motor Toon Grand Prix 2

Platform: **PSone**
Developer: **SCEJ**
Year: **1996**

It may not look it, but back in the PSone's early days Motor Toon Grand Prix 2 was one of the best racers available on the system. As the name suggests, it was incredibly cartoony, but the playful visuals were complemented by surprisingly robust driving mechanics. The drift system for instance, whilst taking a while to get the hang of (especially since the cars would comically lean as they went around corners) was second only to Ridge Racer in fun factor. The icing on the cake was a good selection of powerups, a wide variety of kooky courses and some great mini-games.

An in-house Sony title, Motor Toon GP2 was fun, lighthearted gaming that also packed a punch. Wonder Clock!

Buy this game or Michael Ancel will cry. And she'll bash you

Beyond Good & Evil

Platform: **All**
Developer: **Ubisoft**
Year: **2003**

Why BG&E didn't sell through the roof is beyond us. One of the best games of 2003, Beyond Good & Evil contained all of the elements that usually go into making a hit - great graphics, personality, compelling, addictive and varied gameplay, diverse environments and level design, excellent pacing, great puzzles, a fun story with likable characters - but for some reason pretty much nobody who wasn't a games journalist or a friend of a games journalist bought a copy. It's cheap now. Buy it. Buy another copy for someone you like. If you don't we'll send some really cranky French game developers to your house to show you the error of your ways.

Bust-A-Move

Platform: **PSone**
Developer: **Enix**
Year: **1998**

Renamed Bust-A-Groove for Western release, this classic title has nothing to do with a certain well-known puzzle game, and everything to do with getting your groove on. Years before You Got Served, Bust-A-Move challenged you to dance off against your opponents. The character lineup was eclectic and funky, and each had a unique dancing style, from J-pop and disco through to breaking and hip hop, as well as a signature tune. The gameplay involved hitting d-pad/button combos to the beat, and half the fun was in experimenting and doing your own thing to create a seamless sequence.

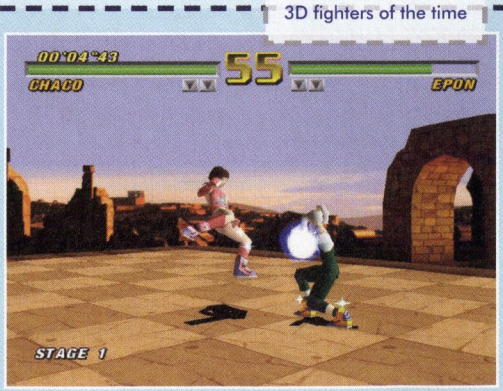
It's still quite a unique title too, straddling rhythm games, PaRappa style Simon Says and fighting titles. Heavily utilising gourard shading, Bust-A-Move also featured some of the nicest looking (and moving) characters on PSone. Hey Square Enix - it's time to bring Kitty-N back.

Hostile Waters: Anteus Rising

Platform: **PC**
Developer: **Rage**
Year: **2001**

Sometimes games get a little too ambitious for their own good. Back in the days where people weren't really clamouring for games that fused elements of different genres together, Hostile Waters: Anteus Rising was something of a left-field wildcard. A mixture of RTS, FPS and RPG elements based around a brilliantly written story by genius comic author Warren Ellis, Hostile Wares put players in charge of a battleship/aircraft carrier/nanotechnology factory capable of creating vehicles and units (all rendered in quite sexy 3D) and gives them the task of wiping out a number of unfriendly people, vehicles and some things better described by Ellis.

Ironically, one of the least square looking 3D fighters of the time



Tobal 2

Platform: **PSone**
Developer: **Squaresoft/ Dream Factory**
Year: **1997**

During the PSone era, Square tried their hand at a few different genres. There was the awesome shooter Einhander (which almost made the list), the classic Bushido Blade, and the less impressive Ehrgeiz (which starred the likes of Cloud, Tifa, Vincent, and Sephiroth). Perhaps their greatest title outside the RPG genre, however, was Tobal 2. It improved on the first Tobal (which was released here) in almost every area, delivering one of the smoothest, sweetest 3D fighting games that anyone had ever been seen. The game ran at 60fps thanks to the gourard shaded characters, and the fighting system rewarded mastery with a great low/medium/high system and numerous combos to learn for each character.

Then there was the expanded quest mode that featured an entire town in addition to dungeons to trawl through, and included the ability to capture enemies and use them in the main game. To top it all off, the characters were designed by Dragon Ball Z's Akira Toriyama.

An enigma wrapped in a mystery...

ADoM

Platform: **PC**
Developer: **Thomas Biskup**
Year: **1994+**

It's was hard deciding whether or not ADoM would fit into retro or modern games as it's neither 3D or particularly advanced. Eventually we settled on modern because there have been more updates post 3D era than there were prior to it. ADoM (Ancient Domains of Mystery) is the pinnacle of Rogue style gaming. For those unfamiliar with the genre, Rogue style games are ASCII RPGs filled with randomised dungeons, hundreds of monsters and items. ADoM goes one step further by having literally hundreds of race/class combinations, a full world map, mission specific locations and storylines to propel the action - not bad for a game that clocks in at just over 850k.

Valkyrie Profile

Platform: **PSone**
Developer: **Tri-Ace**
Year: **2000**

If you picked up the excellent Star Ocean 'Til the End of Time a few months ago, do yourself a favour and try and track down a copy of this game. It's from the same dev house, Tri-Ace, and really shook things up in the RPG genre. Taking its basic setting from Norse mythology, you play as the Valkyrie Lenneth, a fighter who helps prepare true warriors for Ragnarok, the final battle in the next world. Thus, a large part of the gameplay is in taking on dead or immortal party members, training them up and eventually transferring them to Valhalla. Other mechanics are similarly quirky, with limited time periods allocated for each chapter, side-scrolling dungeons and a mash-happy party battle system. It's not all perfect, but there's enough interesting ideas that Valkyrie Profile is a must-play for RPG fans. Mechanics aside, Valkyrie Profile is rich in story and characters, and its traditional hand-drawn visual style is just another reason to pick it up.

Anachronox

Platform: **PC**
Developer: **Ion Storm**
Year: **2001**

Whilst it's not hard to find a game with a compelling story, or humour, or good looks, it is hard to find them all present in the one package. Anachronox, a console style RPG developed for the PC is a laugh out loud funny game with a story that rivals a number of science fiction films and is probably the best the venerable Quake II engine ever looked. As Sylvester (Sly) Boots, a charming rogue and his companions (one of which is a nearly useless robot who looks like an iMac with feet) you're on a mission to save the universe. If all of that doesn't amaze you then try this on for size - John Romero worked on Anachronox and it doesn't suck!

Ain't no thang like a chicken wang...

Outcast

Platform: **PC**
Developer: **Appeal**
Year: **1999**

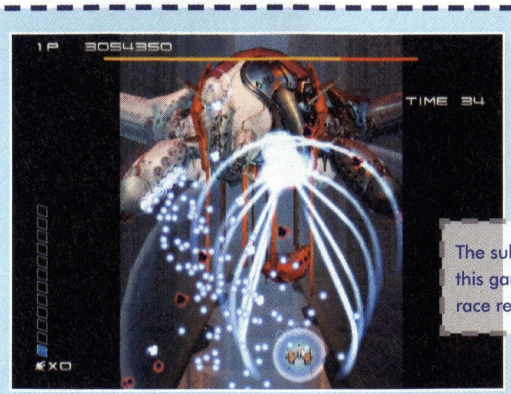
With Outcast, Belgian developer Appeal crafted one of PC gaming's most unusual and - for the fortunate few - memorable virtual worlds. Unusual because it was so utterly alien, teeming with strange creatures with even stranger names, and because its voxel-based graphics engine rendered an uneven, organic environment at a time when clean polygonal lines were the only things that impressed.

Memorable because it offered the kind of free-form adventure hardcore PC gamers desire but very rarely get to enjoy - a vast world full of interesting characters, not mere quest kiosks, in which you could talk, shoot, sneak or ride your way to success. Outcast captivated and rewarded gamers who were prepared to let their imagination go. A true original.

Ikaruga

Platform: **Sega Dreamcast/ Nintendo Gamecube**
Developer: **Treasure**
Year: **2002/2003**

It's like Ikaruga has been cursed in the PAL territories - first it appeared on the Dreamcast, a great little console that nobody bought and a year and a bit later it was released in incredibly limited numbers (less than one hundred copies made it into the country) on GameCube. Mores the pity because Ikaruga is the pinnacle of Treasure's scrolling shooters. Gameplay is simple but inspired - the ship is based around two sides, black and white and the player must switch between the sides to absorb enemy bullets of the same colour and these bullets can later be released as homing missiles to do huge damage to the bosses. Brilliant.



The subtext of this game was race relations

X-ARCADE 2-PLAYER

RRP: $269.95 • URL: www.arcadegamingaustralia.com.au

There's an old Hyper saying, "there's nothing like having a good stick in your hand", and it's as true today as it was back when we first coined it half a sentence ago. For the arcade gaming fan, ensuring their home setup is as close to the arcade experience is paramount, and arcade sticks are at the core of this thinking. There are quite a few models to choose from, but the X-Arcade 2-Player box caught our eye recently, so we got one in to give it a thrashing.

What was initially appealing about it is the fact that you have twin sticks and buttons on the one unit, allowing two people to go stick on stick. Unfortunately the reality of playing two player games is that the sticks are just a little too close together (definitely closer than on an actual arcade unit), so it gets pretty cramped, verging on just friends spooning. Thus, we'd probably recommend picking up the X-Arcade Solo for $179.95 instead.

The construction of the unit really can't be faulted - it's built like a tank, and can probably stand a fair bit of punishment. It also looks spot on, as though someone has just ripped the counter out of an arcade machine and brought it home. The buttons all feel good too, but we're still a undecided about the feel of the sticks. To be perfectly honest, we think they were made with MAME in mind, and for that purpose they work really well. When it comes to fighting games though (which is our primary use for arcade sticks), there's too much play for our liking. Rather than being able to keep your taps and quarter circles small and concise, the degree of movement is such that it feels clumsy. The orientation of the sticks also takes a little bit of getting used to, so we'd recommend trying them in store before buying.

The main thing to bear in mind with X-Arcade is that if you want a truly universal arcade stick, you'll need to buy adapters for other consoles separately. The system comes with PC connectivity out of the box but each additional console connection will set you back $34.95. The good news is that you can get adapters for PS2, Xbox, GameCube and even Dreamcast, so whatever your poison, you can get your fix with this system. All in all it's an expensive proposition, but if you're serious about your arcade gaming, this is well worth checking out. <<

SMART JOY FRAG

RRP: $69.95 • URL: www.arcadegamingaustralia.com.au

Despite sporting one of those bizarre Engrish names that seem so synonymous with third party game peripherals, this is actually one of the cooler PS2/Xbox products we've tested in a while. Available for both PS2 and Xbox, the Smart Joy Frag is an adapter that lets you use your mouse and keyboard with your console of choice. It's pretty straightforward as well. The system comes with a number of keyboard presets for popular games (the product has been available for quite a while now so they're relatively old games) which you can activate via the F keys. Most gamers, however, will want to customise their keyboard setup themselves, which, although not having any kind of visual indicator, is pretty straightforward, and once you're happy you can save the setup on an F hotkey. You can also adjust sensitivity and dead zone, which is a good inclusion.

Once you're up and running, console FPS titles suddenly feel a whole lot tighter - it's fantastic having the accuracy we've had for years on PC. It really does make a difference. The only caveats are that both the PS2 and Xbox adapters are $69.95 which is probably a little steep, and that they don't support USB, only PS/2, so anyone with a vaguely modern keyboard and mouse will need PS/2 adapters. <<

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*Limited quantities - offer subject to availability. Bonus PS2 controller with purchase of Stolen on PS2. Bonus Xbox controller with purchase of Stolen on Xbox.

ASUS EXTREME AX 800XT PCI EXPRESS

RRP: $1365 • URL: www.asus.com.au

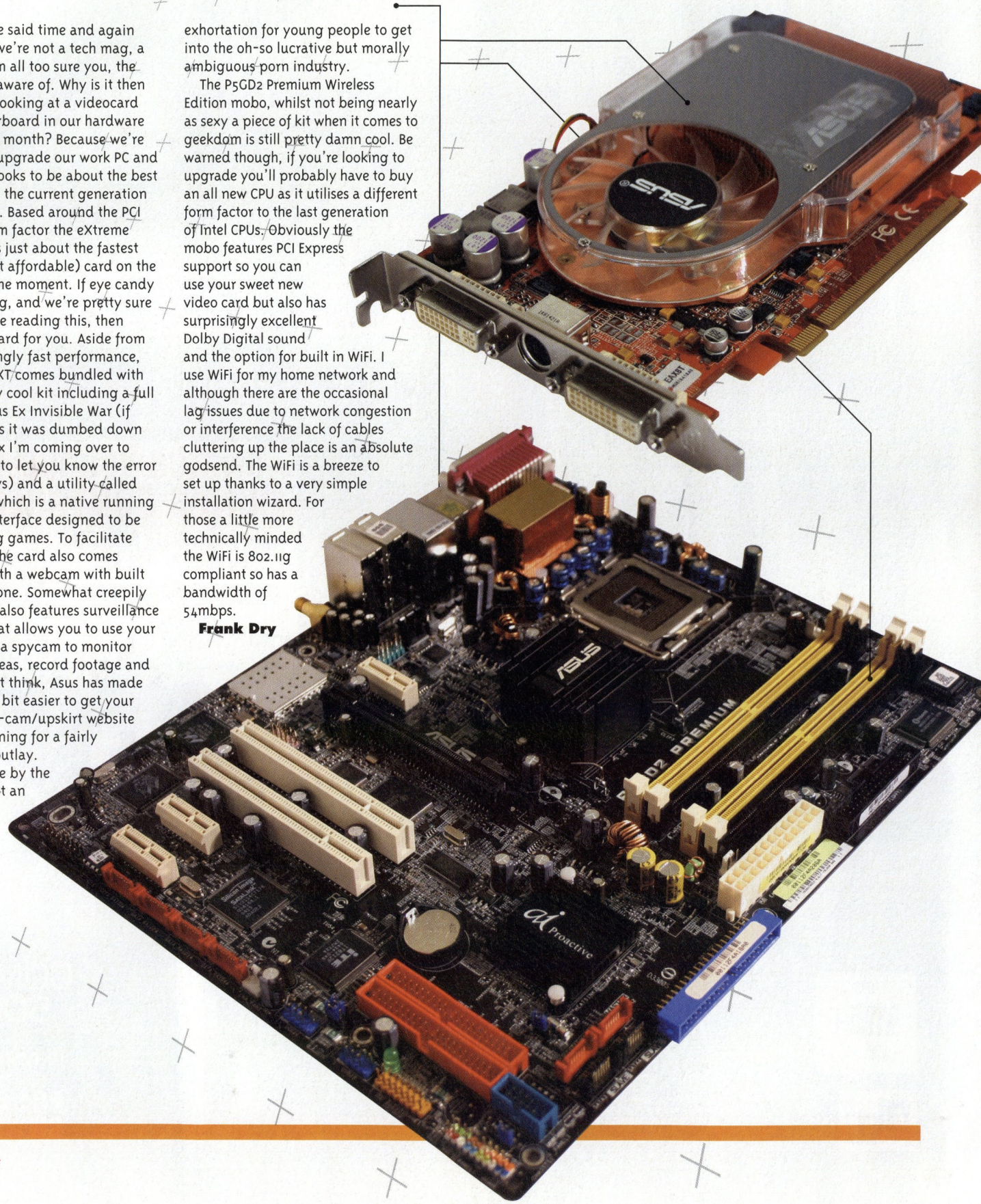
ASUS P5GD2 PREMIUM WIRELESS EDITION

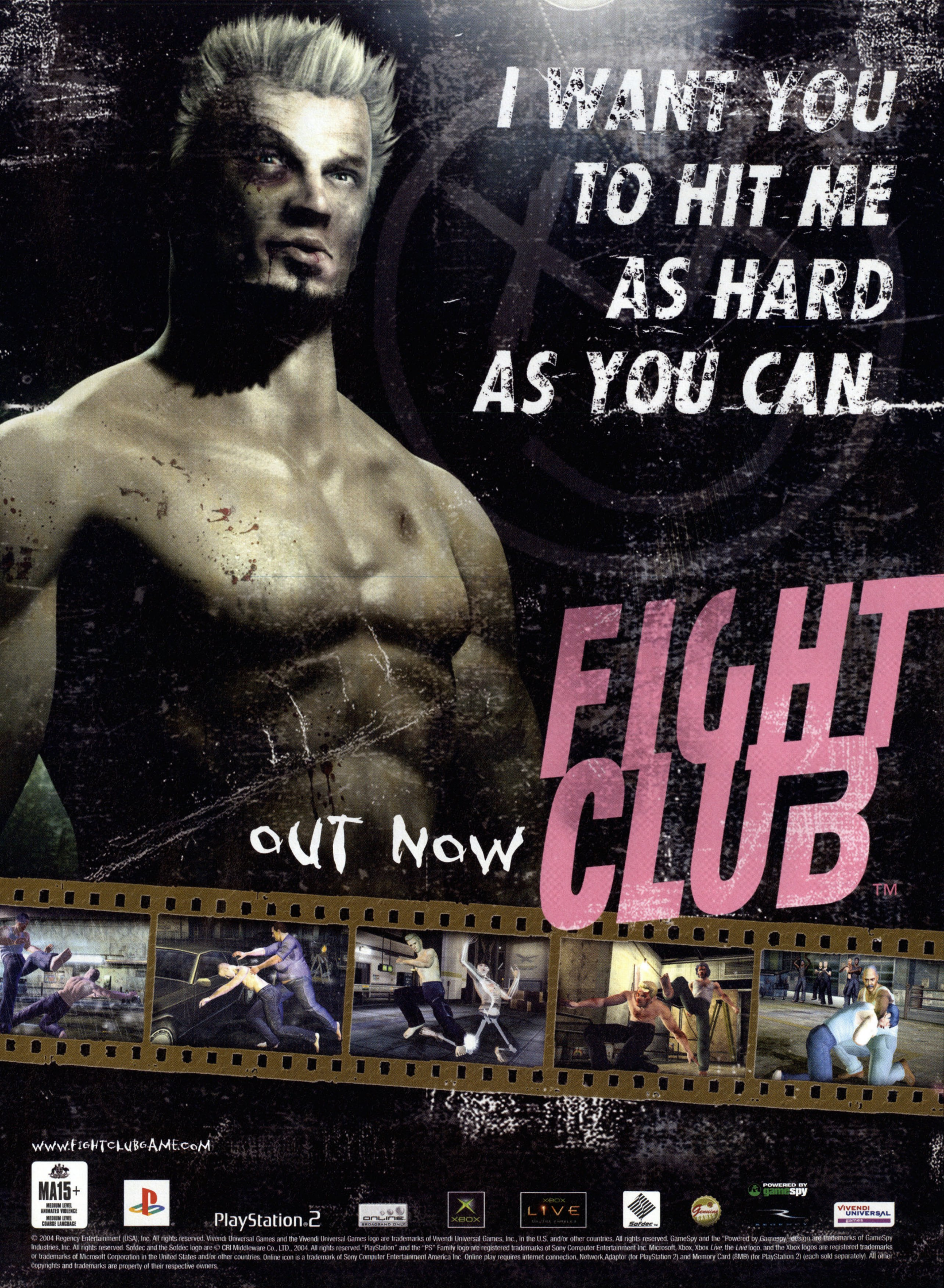
RRP: $445 • URL: www.asus.com.au

We've said time and again that we're not a tech mag, a fact that I'm all too sure you, the reader are aware of. Why is it then that we're looking at a videocard and motherboard in our hardware section this month? Because we're looking to upgrade our work PC and so far this looks to be about the best combo that the current generation has to offer. Based around the PCI Express form factor the eXtreme AX 800XT is just about the fastest (and almost affordable) card on the market at the moment. If eye candy is your thing, and we're pretty sure it is if you're reading this, then this is the card for you. Aside from the blisteringly fast performance, the AX 800XT comes bundled with some pretty cool kit including a full copy of Deus Ex Invisible War (if anyone says it was dumbed down for the Xbox I'm coming over to your house to let you know the error of your ways) and a utility called GameFace which is a native running A/V chat interface designed to be used during games. To facilitate GameFace the card also comes bundled with a webcam with built in microphone. Somewhat creepily the bundle also features surveillance software that allows you to use your webcam as a spycam to monitor different areas, record footage and the like. Just think, Asus has made it that little bit easier to get your nasty toilet-cam/upskirt website up and running for a fairly low initial outlay. This is a joke by the way and not an exhortation for young people to get into the oh-so lucrative but morally ambiguous porn industry.

The P5GD2 Premium Wireless Edition mobo, whilst not being nearly as sexy a piece of kit when it comes to geekdom is still pretty damn cool. Be warned though, if you're looking to upgrade you'll probably have to buy an all new CPU as it utilises a different form factor to the last generation of Intel CPUs. Obviously the mobo features PCI Express support so you can use your sweet new video card but also has surprisingly excellent Dolby Digital sound and the option for built in WiFi. I use WiFi for my home network and although there are the occasional lag issues due to network congestion or interference the lack of cables cluttering up the place is an absolute godsend. The WiFi is a breeze to set up thanks to a very simple installation wizard. For those a little more technically minded the WiFi is 802.11g compliant so has a bandwidth of 54mbps.

Frank Dry





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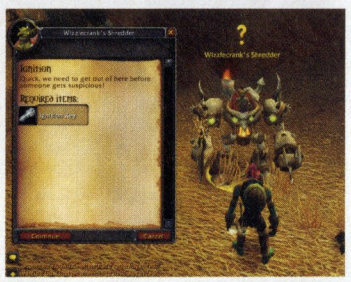
World of Warcraft: An update

>> Daniel Wilks

Every new MMO goes through an uncomfortable teething process, and World of Warcraft is no exception. The game has been plagued with problems since day one but unlike a number of other MMOs that shall remain nameless, the vast majority of these problems stemmed not from unfinished code but from the developers not realising how popular their game would be. Within the first two months of release, WoW saw more players joining the game than the servers could handle resulting in cues to log in and frequent server crashes due to overload. Fortunately the server problem seems to be almost resolved currently, though there is still the occasional problem caused by server instability like lag spikes causing widespread death through the server.

The major problems facing the game now are more balance based, most specifically the balance, or lack thereof between a few of the classes. If you play the game, and I'm sure many of you do, or have read the WoW forums then you'll be familiar with the frequent calls for Shamans and Paladins to be nerfed and Warriors to be buffed. While it's debatable whether the former two classes have to be nerfed (I've leveled to 15+ one character from every class to test the balance at lower levels), the problem with Warrior balance seriously needs to be looked at by Blizzard. The balance issues are holdovers from the closed beta in which Warriors were an uber powerful class capable of both tanking (absorbing a huge amount of damage and keeping mob attention) as well as dishing out as much damage as the straight DPS (Damage Per Second) classes. Unfortunately for the Warriors in the retail version of the game their powers have been seriously curtailed in what appears to have been a bit of a knee-jerk reaction to the criticism of the Warrior from the beta. Recently,



[above right] Wiz and crank - together at last! Still not as addictive as WoW though

in an effort to let the developers know of their discontent a group of players organised what has come to be known as the "Million Gnome March" in which a massive group of disenfranchised Warriors marched through one of the servers in protest - unfortunately for all involved the protest caused the server to crash and instead of gaining the notice of the developers it seems to have gained their ire instead.

Problems aside, a few months on and WoW is still as fun as it was on day one. Little of the promised extra content has appeared as yet aside from a single instanced dungeon for high level characters, but within the next few months we should be seeing some very exciting extra content, including the PvP focused, high level Battlegrounds expansion. Battlegrounds will immediately be familiar to fans of the Warcraft franchise as it hearkens back to the days in which it was an RTS. From the details released so far, Battlegrounds will see full PvP combat between the Alliance and Horde played out in a specialised instanced battlefield in which both sides will fight to take strategic and resource points, hold fortifications, hire mercenaries and generally fight to the death. This content will be restricted to higher level players but considering it's possible to level up a character to 60 (the current level cap) within a month of steady play, that's not long for an MMO. Other high level content promised by the end of the year includes Hero classes which are special classes for those who have reached the level cap and wish to go beyond, an honour system for PvP combat that will

[above] There's no emote for what I'm feeling! Oh wait, yes there is...

see player reputation rise and fall with various factions due to their behaviour in PvP, new epic mounts for lvl 60+ players, new epic armour and weapons and a half dozen or so new instance dungeons/events. It's shaping up to be a pretty big year.

In more interesting news there was an event a few weeks ago (at time of writing) that may see the birth of player created content. Two enterprising players (who shall remain nameless because there has been some talk about banning them for their actions and I don't want to add fuel to the fire) trained (drew agro from a monster and lead it to a location) a mid-high lvl unique mob by the name of Stiches into a low level town and invited all of the low level characters to get in on the action to try to kill it. By all accounts it was quite an epic struggle. With any luck other people may take some inspiration from the Stitches incident and set up more player run events, whether they be huge battles between low level characters and a high level mob like Stitches, treasure hunts or a player run storyline leading to a PvP duel.

Anyway, if you see Bain, Sanguis, Keishidaya or Sapientes (the four characters I usually play) online, give me a wave and I'll lend a hand if I can and you can join the Hyper Guild - Hyper solidarity baby. <<

Links

>> Kosta Andreadis

Sometimes it takes a Duo

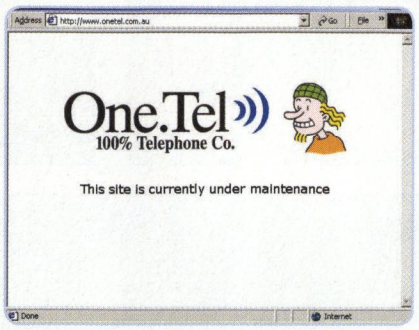
http://www.binaryzoo.com/

>> Being a gaming magazine, Hyper law dictates that "every once in a while the links section has to feature a link to some free PC game or something", one that "our readers will get a kick out of!" And so in a bid to hide the lack of wackiness and Chef Martin Yan from this link I will now place the blame onto Daniel Wilks. Reason? Well that's a fair and grammatically incorrect one worded question, the answer is simple - he wears glasses and worships the ground that hack Joss Whedon walks on. Sure DUO is a fun time killer, but Hyper readers everywhere (i.e. you) demand more from their links. So please, read on.

Yan Can Cook You up a New Theme

http://www.themexp.org/

>> If there's anything in this world worse than testicular cancer (aka ball disease) then it's the default blue coloured theme for Windows XP. Is there anyone in this great world of ours out there that actually likes that hideous blue monstrosity? If there is, drop us a line (cue: horrifyingly funny joke) - so we can hunt you down and dice you up like Yan Can Cook! For those of you that didn't find that funny, Chef Martin Yan was the star of a popular cooking show in the 90s called 'Yan Can Cook' where he would dice vegetables at incredible speed whilst grinning to boost ratings and audience applaud. He's no longer on TV because one time he sliced and diced so fast he julienne'd his right arm, now re-read the joke and laugh dumb ass.



Gone but not forgotten

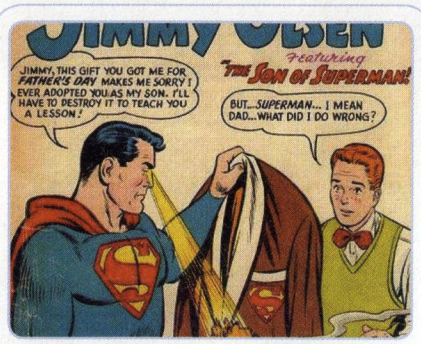
http://www.disobey.com/ghostsites/mef.shtml

>> The casualty list is quite large, and a quick glance over the names is enough to make anyone feel small. The worst may be over but its impact can be felt the world over, websites everywhere dropping like flies. They all fell silent for one reason or another - some would blame a large bubble bursting whilst others would take more creative liberties with their reasoning and blame the brief reanimation of Lenin's cold communist corpse in 1998. Apparently he didn't mind capitalism too much and went back to sleep. For whatever reason they lost their server space and domain name registry one thing for sure is that they will be sorely missed, or not.

You can't call shotgun until you see it

http://www.bit-tech.net/article/139/1

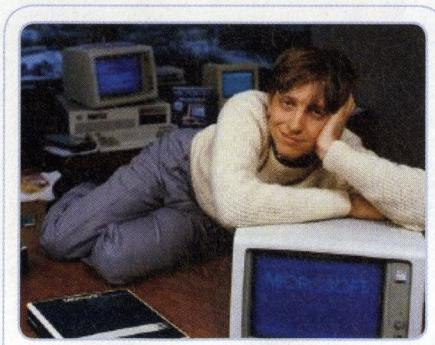
>> This is a site for those that when using the word 'the' they opt for the more daring 'teh', to inject their life of nerd with a dash of cool. And how! This guy turned a remote control car into a gaming PC, a feat that is sure to crown him and his new PC's hard drive full of porn, the 'King and Queen of Fragfrest 2005'. So if you had hopes of winning that honour with the water cooling system you just rigged up to cool your over-clocked Pentium 4 3.0 to Pentium 7 12.2 you're sorely mistaken.



S = CISGIFS

http://supermanisadick.com/

>> The Superman we all know, and yes, love, is no better than a common garden variety street thug. This may come as a shock to those that picture Superman as Christopher Reeve saving the world from such devious super villains as Zod, the Lawnmower Man from the Sun, Oscar winning actor Gene Hackman and the hilariously coked up Richard Pryor – so let me explain. Before he did all that good stuff Superman lived in the comic world, sans Reeve, where he whored himself and his powers for the almighty dollar. The depths of his depravity can be witnessed here, so much so that he can no longer be called Superman, but instead 'crazy invulnerable space guy in lame suit'.



Strike a Pose!

http://www.snopes.com/photos/people/gates.asp

>> There's a motto that most pretty people adhere to, and that is "if the camera loves you, you've got to love it back." Bill Gates is one of those people, no joke. As easy as it is to make fun of the RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD, one who makes more money in five minutes than this magazine can pull in a year. A man whose vast wealth allows him to sleep on a pile of virgin underwear (his own), travel to the far reaches of the globe from his bed to his PC - we won't. These snaps taken of young Bill Gates in 1983 feature a new side of Bill the public, and opposite sex for that matter, have never seen before - his sexy side.

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52 Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

When too much Snake is barely enough...

Reviews

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Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

Attention? More than YOU can handle!

Gamers have very poor attention spans. Thus says the conventional wisdom held by a generation of adults who love to point out that 'in their day' they had to entertain themselves and were rarely bored. According to this generation, who also happen to make up the majority of our decision makers today, gamers' constant lust for sensory stimulation and their inability to remain focused on simple things is a cause for concern over their attention. In turn, it is argued many teenage gamers are setting themselves up to fail in the workplace.

These accusations have been levelled at gamers since the dawn of popular videogaming in the 1980s. Why is it then we haven't seen penniless gamers unable to find gainful employment due to their inability to adapt to corporate workspaces? The trouble stems from a traditional view of attention that simply does not reflect the reality of the modern world.

As with many historical precedents, those with greater experience of the older path of activity will favour it when compared with less understood forms of action. Those of the generation prior to the advent of gaming are part of a generation who grew up in the golden age of television. This age followed a similar model to its own predecessor, where families would gather around the radio and listen in to the night's programming. At this time, attention was often given to a single channel for the evening - if there were any alternative channels at all. This concept of 'sit back' media, or passive attention programming, has been the hallmark of radio and television programming for most of their history.

Along came videogaming and changed our relationship to the screen. With this new 'sit forward' media, active attention was the order of the hour. For the first time the viewer became the user, with the ability to influence and control what appeared on the screen, participating in their own televisual experiences.

Timothy Leary noted 'the Nintendo phenomenon is about equal to that of the Gutenberg printing press... the ability to change what's on the screen [holds] tremendous empowerment.' Decried by some as a waste of time, this hobby gave our generation a new framework for our relationship with the screen itself!

What is evident from this new framework is that it is a skill to be practised much more so than passive viewing. While it is suggested we now have a shorter attention span, what has actually been gained, according to Douglas Rushkoff, is a broader attention range plus a faster absorption time. While sadly, being humans, we have no true multitasking functionality available, what gaming can offer is to fine tune our ability to shift attention rapidly between information sources and to quickly understand the information being presented - as close to multitasking as a human can get.

While rapidly shifting attention seems to be of core concern, associated with problems such as ADHD, when it is understood as part of a combined skill set offering broad attention management and rapid information comprehension, it begins to take shape as an incredibly valuable set of skills for the modern workplace.

Phones, email, colleagues, to do lists, meeting schedules... It is a requisite of this modern office experience to filter information streams, prioritising and completing work in an appropriate fashion.

Next time someone claims your attention span is wanting, better tell them it is their poor attention range and slow absorption time that is the real problem in today's workplace.

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about?

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Suckier than Captain Suck on the Planet of the Vacuum Cleaners	There might be a glimmer of fun lurking behind their ugly facades	Aside from including 69, there's not much going for these...	If your Gran gave you one of these for xmas it wouldn't suck	Worth doing a small dance of delight over when buying...	Praise the gaming gods for these games! Pure gameplay

RESIDENT EVIL 4

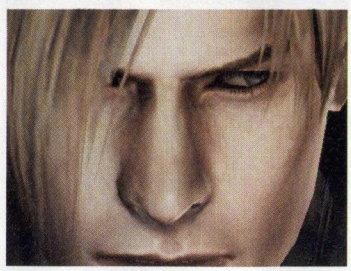
KOSTA ANDREADIS is pure evil

Somewhere early in the game a chainsaw wielding maniac starts charging at you. You decide to fire off a couple of rounds but he gets up close, barely flinching, and cuts through your neck like it was butter. Blood goes everywhere and even though you had full health, without your head it's game over. But you decide to give it another shot and this time when he charges, you aim lower and make short work of Mr. Chainsaw's legs sending him to the ground in agony. It's probably at this point when you wonder whether or not you're playing Resident Evil, the granddaddy of the survival horror genre, a series that over the years has remained enjoyable if a little stale. Everything in the series that has come before Resident Evil 4 stayed true to the formula and template etched with the original PlayStation title from 1996. Yet here, almost a decade later, arrives a game that proves to be the defining release not only in the series but perhaps the action genre as a whole. Resident Evil 4 is the first must have title for the year, a relentless barrage of edge of your seat action, suspense and cinematic disbelief. And all with the same clunky control scheme the series is known for - go figure.

IS THIS THE END FOR ZOMBIE SHAKESPEARE?

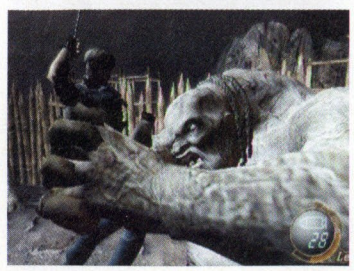
You begin your quest in a Spanish village somewhere in the mountains. It's an unsettling place, and before long you have your back to the wall as the hordes of villagers that are approaching both slowly and menacingly coalesce into a mob. They then break up in an attempt to surround and ambush you at every turn - they'll break through windows, doors and even fight in formation. Ok, so these guys are smarter than the zombies the series is usually known for, which in case you didn't know, are nowhere to be found in Resident Evil 4. You heard right, this is Resident Evil with no zombies, instead you get creatures and enemies that would make encountering a zombie feel like a reunion with a long lost sibling - the 'evil' that the title so casually alludes to is catered for and then some. You don't need to be a fan of the series to appreciate Resident Evil 4, and although the events in this game take place long after the viral outbreak in Raccoon City and the demise of the Umbrella Corporation, specific knowledge of the previous games is not required; they are only mentioned in passing.

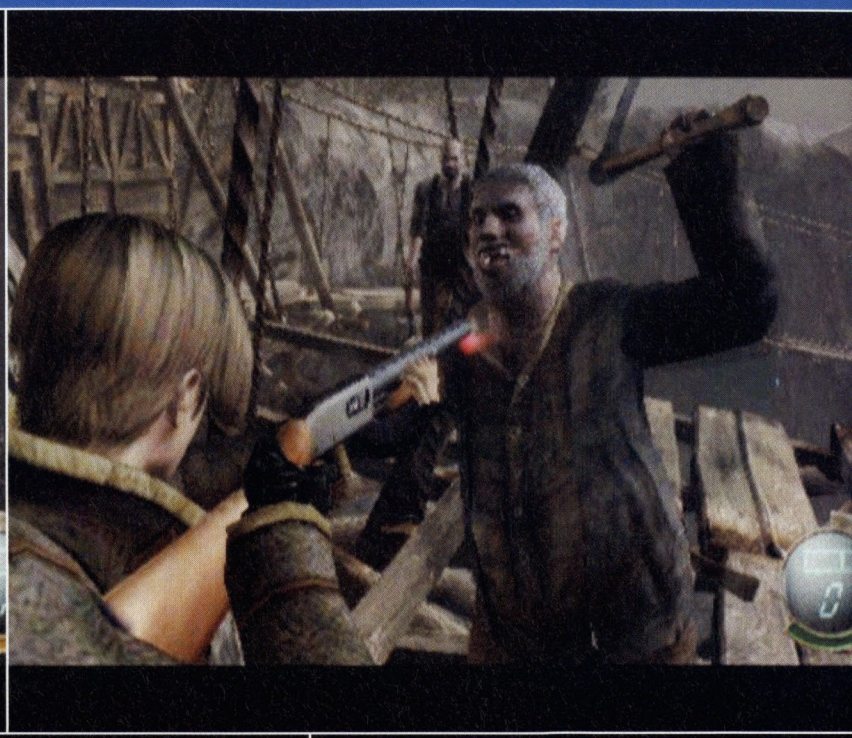
Players take control of Leon Kennedy (last seen in Resident Evil 2) a retired cop and government agent in Europe searching for the US President's kidnapped daughter. And so the question is raised, if these guys aren't zombies then what exactly is wrong with them and what do they want with the President's



[above 2040] "Don't call me Leon-poo"

[below] Aye carumba!

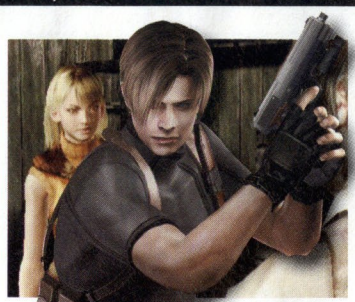


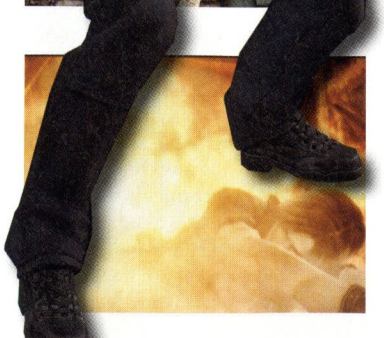


Soy totalmente malvado. ¡Le mataré!

Let's hope he's had his Weetbix

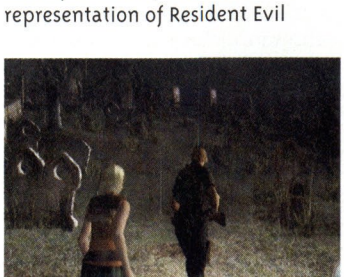
¡Usted va a conseguir paaaanched a amante de la madre!





daughter? The storyline is very much in the vein of the series, featuring clichéd characters, drastic plot turns and B-grade voice acting, but it's presented with such cinematic flair that before long you'll be engrossed in this story of suspense, mystery and most importantly biological and supernatural horror.

Instead of pre-rendered backdrops, a static camera and slow building suspense, Resident Evil 4 provides the polar opposite - a fully realised 3D gaming world, a dynamic camera system and non-stop action oriented gameplay. Good presentation and graphics can go a long way in creating mood and atmosphere, especially in a genre that relies heavily on them, and the visual representation of Resident Evil 4 certainly plays a huge role in making this game so compelling.



Resident Evil 4 provides countless hours of edge of your seat thrills

As anyone who's been to Raccoon City before would know, the Resident Evil series is no stranger to impressive visuals, but this time we have a fully animated and realised gaming world, one that is as detailed and menacing as any pre-rendered backdrop the series has churned out to date. And that's mighty impressive.

Emphasising the sophistication of the visuals further, the numerous cut-scenes in the game are created using the in-game engine and run in real-time. Of course this is nothing new, but aside from being highly stylised and cinematic in their execution, the Resident Evil 4 engine excels in animation and effects that will have you rubbing your eyes in disbelief.

Yes, RE4 features presentation of the highest order, a testament to the technical abilities of the team at Capcom, who have created a game engine that features a visual quality that would make the latest $700 PC video card blush. Thankfully the gameplay's there in spades too.

The only thing intact from previous incarnations, as mentioned earlier, is the control scheme, whereby up and down moves your character forward or backward and the directional controls turn your character from side to side. Oh, and if you want to shoot you have to pull down on the shoulder trigger which stops Leon dead in his tracks, bringing up the laser sight of his weapons to aim.

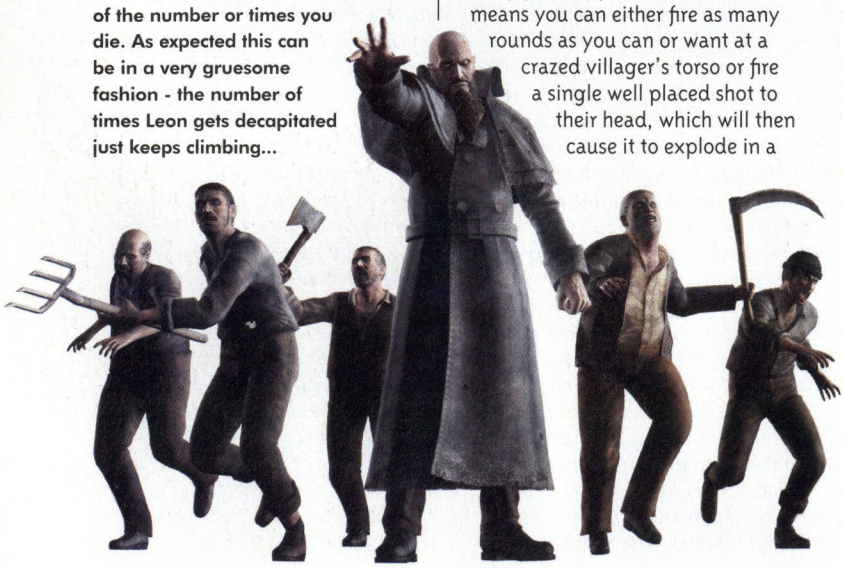
As detrimental as these two core gameplay elements sound, before long the fact that you can't strafe, or walk and shoot will become a distant memory. You'll never find yourself in a situation where these two things would be a necessity, and as bad an endorsement as that sounds the reality is that Resident Evil 4 provides countless hours of edge of your seat thrills with nary a dull moment or sense of repetition. Simply put, the gameplay is amazing, and that's being said without a hint of sarcasm.

The back is definitely the manliest place to shoot someone

When Mormons come to your door, there's only one option...

...Invite them in for milk and cookies! (not pictured)

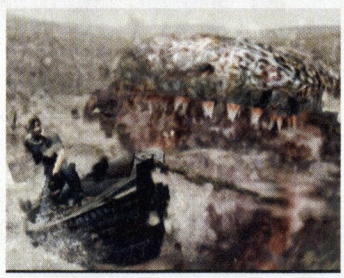
GRUESOME The Resident Evil series has long been known for its gory and mature content and the only difference here would be the intensity of its presentation. Resident Evil 4 features some amazing character animation and model detail, and when someone or something gets dismembered the results are frightening to say the least. Leon himself is no exception, as the game keeps a running count of the number or times you die. As expected this can be in a very gruesome fashion - the number of times Leon gets decapitated just keeps climbing...



RESIDENT EVIL VOICE GUY CALLS IT "RESIDENT EVIL FOURRRRRRR"

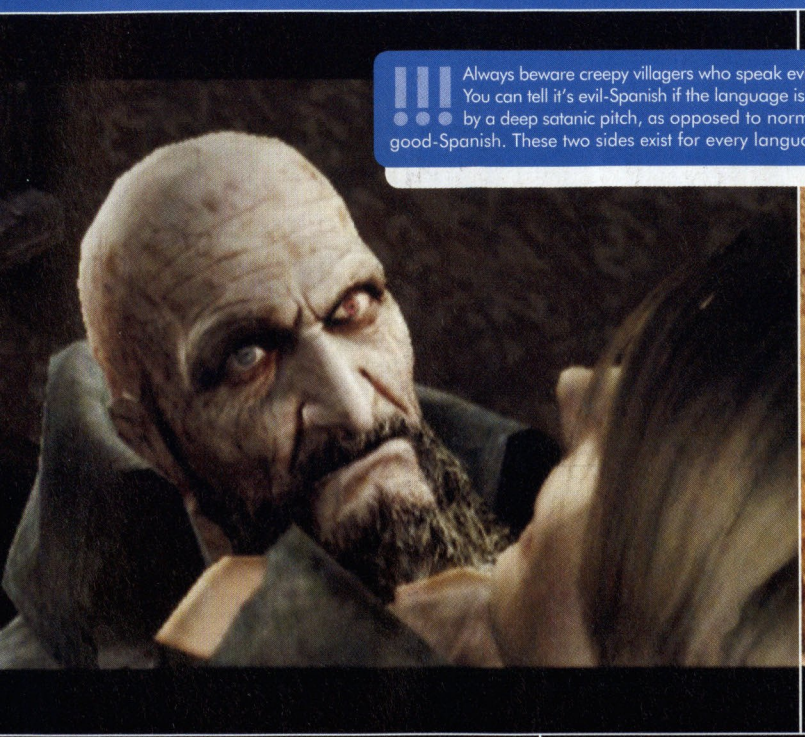
What once seemed clunky and restrictive will become second nature and there are many reasons why RE4 plays as well as it does, but one would most certainly be the new weapon and combat system. Firstly ammunition is plentiful, and secondly you can target specific body parts of your attackers, which means you can either fire as many rounds as you can or want at a crazed villager's torso or fire a single well placed shot to their head, which will then cause it to explode in a very violent manner. Couple this with a new monetary system that allows you to buy numerous new weapons or even upgrade the ones currently in your possession and the result is a game that is very progressive. A classic example of this would be the head shot, something that once mastered can be almost impossible to resist, a fact that Capcom are well aware of. Later on in the game players will find out that a head shot can make matters worse: where there was once a head players can expect to find something that's almost indescribable and imminently more dangerous. This is one of the many clever touches that help keep the game fresh over its many hours.

Another would be the introduction of the store front and dissolution of the cumbersome inventory system the series is known for, which are both welcome changes and fantastic in execution. The store front and weapon system especially bring a more strategic aspect to the seemingly non-stop action of the gameplay. Do I upgrade my shotgun's power or reload time? Do I buy the semi-automatic rifle or do I save my money for a grenade launcher? Will my case even hold all these new weapons or do I need to buy a larger one? Will the merchant pay me a high price for this gold bracelet I just found? In fact there's so much on offer here that it wouldn't be difficult to just pick up and play through the game again once you've completed the main quest.

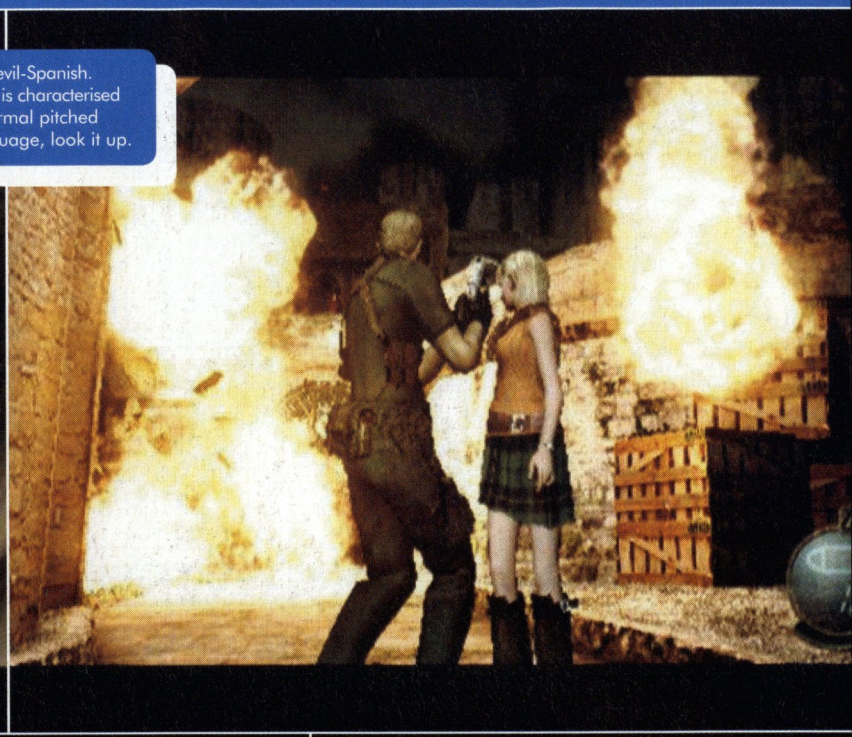


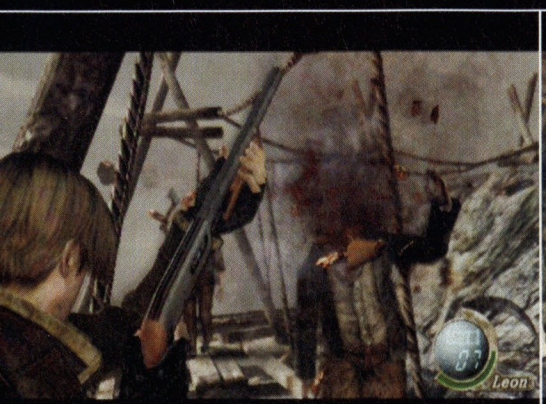
[up] Save me Steve Irwin!

[up] Giving the word "mob" a bad name



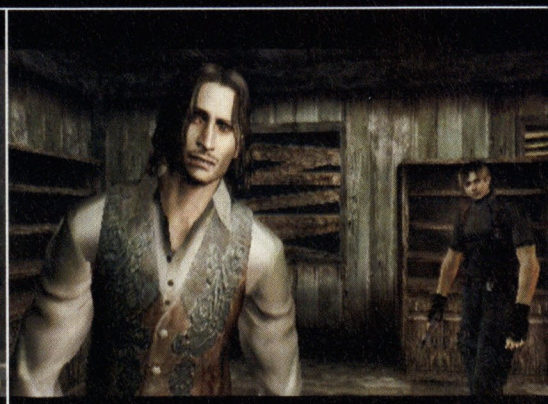
!!! Always beware creepy villagers who speak evil-Spanish. You can tell it's evil-Spanish if the language is characterised by a deep satanic pitch, as opposed to normal pitched good-Spanish. These two sides exist for every language, look it up.



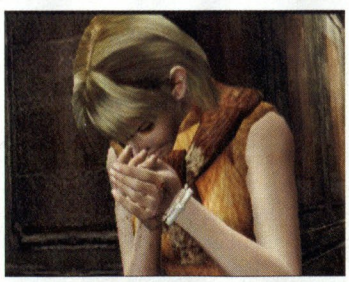


You killed the zombie Flanders! "He was a zombie?"

The sequence that Peter Jackson directed



You're a long way from home yuppie boy



[up] Coughing up some biohazard

IN JAPAN HE CALLS IT "BIOHAZARD FOURRRRRRR"

Resident Evil 4 is the lengthiest title in the series so far, and the game world never stays centralised - there's no one big mansion to explore here. Instead the game opts for a 'get from point a to point b' approach that is very linear but impressively varied. The different locations and variety on offer is commendable to say the least, from dry lifeless village settings, to rain soaked cemeteries, gothic castles, caves and industrial complexes, this is a game that never gets boring.

In fact one of the main drawcards is the excitement that comes from the unknown: what exactly is around the corner here and above all do I really want to know? Creatures and enemies are everywhere and you probably can't go thirty minutes without being ambushed or surprised by some new monstrosity that will test your skills in interesting and very challenging ways. With a control scheme that, on paper, sounds very restrictive the numerous boss battles found in Resident Evil 4 are surprisingly engaging, varied and above all incredibly intense. This is one of the main areas in the game where context sensitive button presses will come into play, for example if a large menacing ogre like creature is about to step on you the screen may flash with a 'press L+R' prompt giving you a split second to dodge the attack if you succeed or face a severe beating if you fail.

» The numerous boss battles are engaging, varied and incredibly tense

The action rarely stops in Resident Evil 4, save for the odd puzzle thrown in to mix things up, and simply walking down an empty path can be perilous as falling boulders can prompt one of the game's many button dash or split second context sensitive sequences.

Over the course of the 20-hour adventure players will experience countless hair raising gaming moments; almost too many to remember with many to linger for years to come. And there's honestly no frustration to be had, save points are frequent, no more ribbons required and if you die you'll restart almost always right before you kicked the bucket. With breathtaking visuals, incredible action-packed gameplay, varied locations, enemies and weapons all wrapped up in a package that rewards completion with an abundant number of great bonus features and modes, Resident Evil 4 is the best and most important title in the series so far. This game can stand toe-to-toe with any of the brilliant games released in the latter portion of 2004. This once landmark if dated series has finally delivered its masterpiece. <<

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Late March

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Amazing visuals, locations, creatures and action.

MINUS: The game runs in non-anamorphic 16:9. Bad Capcom bad.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
95	90	93

OVERALL
94

Scary, tense, and exciting in a way the series has never been.

THE PAIN

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: Snake Eater

ELIOT FISH tunes into that Healing Radio one more time...

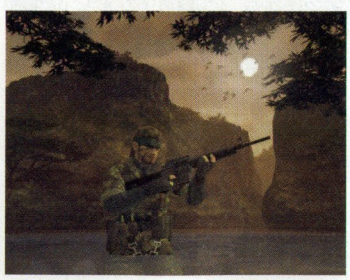
Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima has proved once and for all that he is without a doubt one of the coolest videogame designers of the last decade. As director, writer, designer, planner and producer of Snake Eater, Kojima has clearly saved his best Metal Gear game for last. He's told us this is the last game in the series, and boy does it end with a bang. This is an extremely thoughtful and expertly crafted game that ties together many of the questions left hanging from the previous games in the series, as well as delivering an experience that is so jammed packed with coolness, you'll momentarily forget that 2004 brought us San Andreas, Halo 2 and Half-Life 2. In fact, as good as all those games are, none of them have the kind of focused stylistic vision that is so apparent when playing Snake Eater.

[up] Cor blimey that's a big chopper innit?

I'M STILL IN A DREAM

Kojima was on a mission when he put this game together. Snake Eater is at once a James Bond parody (the game even kicks in with a 007 style intro credits sequence complete with theme song "Snake Eater"), a serious spy thriller, a hive of Metal Gear easter eggs and hidden references, a refinement of all the Metal Gear gameplay that has gone before it, and a thoroughly original action/stealth game. With expertly crafted cutscenes and gorgeous art direction, the talent that oozes off the screen is at times jaw-dropping. A lot of this credit should also go to Yoji Shinkawa, the game's Art Director and Character Designer, who really has excelled himself.

[G'n'R] Welcome to the Jungle



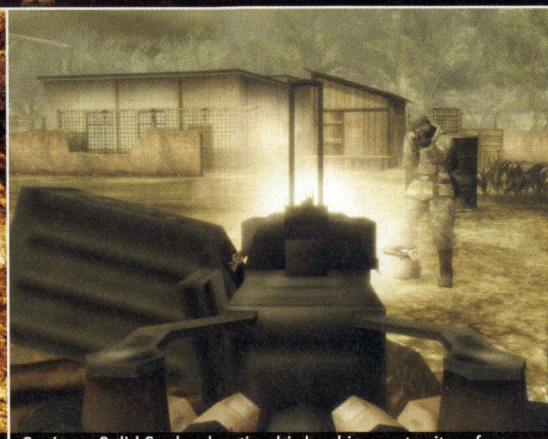
[Starship] Waist deep in the hoopla

With Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, gamers criticised Kojima's over-use of extended cutscenes and long-winded dialogue sequences - and with that game in particular, maybe the criticism was partly justified. The problem with Sons of Liberty is that the story became so convoluted that frustration kicked in, crippling our tolerance for all the self-important speeches. But this is not the case with Snake Eater. This game has a far more straightforward plot, stronger characters, more meaningful exchanges of dialogue, and such beautiful cutscenes that you'll find yourself transfixed for the 35 odd hours it takes for you to complete the main story. The long cutscenes and extended dialogue are this time delivered with such skill and meaning, that you'd be a fool to dismiss them. They are crucial to the experience.

Part of the reason they work so well this time around, is down to the fact that Snake Eater's cast

Bandanas are so 80s... which means he's ahead of his time

Hey Snake, you've got a bat in the cave dude. Hardy ha



Seeing a Solid Snake shooting his load is new territory for me

of characters is amazing. They're fleshed out in such a way that you find yourself becoming emotionally invested in the outcome of the story. Fans who've played either or both of the previous Metal Gear games will also be delighted at the level of information that comes to light as you make your way through the game - from funny references to moments of true enlightenment. By the end of it all, regardless of your experience with previous Metal Gear games, everyone who plays Snake Eater should feel as if they've played one of the coolest games ever.

Once again, the player takes the role of the agent code-named "Snake", but because Snake Eater is set in 1964, we actually see that code-name granted for the very first time. Obviously, you're thinking, this can't be the same Snake from the other Metal Gear games, and of course, you'd be right. To tell you all the game's secrets, though, would be a crime, so we'll simply explain to you that Snake Eater is very much a prequel. This game will reveal to us how everything in the other Metal Gear games came to be, and "Snake" is a key element to the story.

SNAKE? SNAKE! SNAAAAAAKE!!

Because the Codec has not yet been invented, Snake communicates with his team via a simple radio connected to an ear piece. Your support crew this time is Major Zero (the man who gives out your orders), Para-Medic (a female film geek and medic) and Sigint (a weapons and intelligence expert). As with earlier Metal Gear games, signaling your crew will result in dialogue scenes that are both informative and sometimes downright hilarious. Kojima is a self-professed fan of the movies, and it's never been so evident than in Snake Eater. There are constant movie references, from discussions on b-movies like Godzilla and Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein, to some very humourous discussions on James Bond.

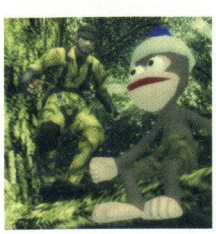
» This game will reveal how everything in the other games came to be

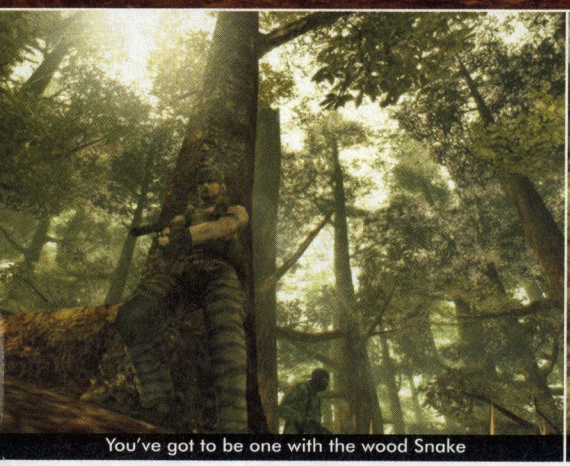
As serious as Kojima is about delivering a cool spy story, he's also the master of self-deprecation, taking the piss out of everything from Snake himself to the fact that you're just playing a videogame. Raiden from Sons of Liberty is particularly picked on throughout the game.

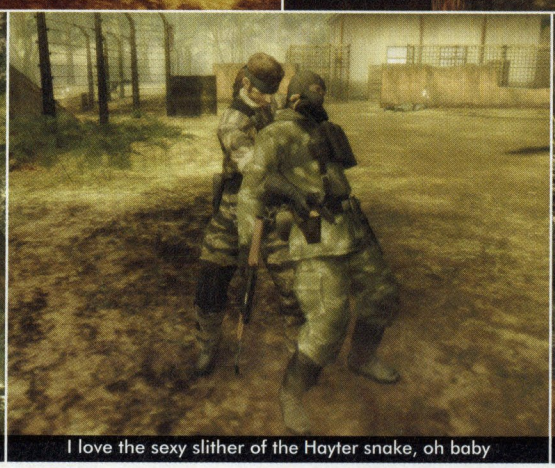
Remember the amazing boss fight from Metal Gear Solid with Psycho Mantis? Because Mantis could "read your mind" through your controller, the player had to actually switch the controller over to port 2 in order to beat him. In Metal Gear Solid 2, there were similar tricks to deceive the player - at one point the graphics partially revealed their wireframe so you weren't sure if what you were playing was "real" or if Snake was unknowingly inside a VR simulation. Once again, Snake Eater will surprise you with innovative ideas. For instance, at one point in the game, turning off the console and coming back to reload later will result in finding yourself inside a nightmare that Snake is having as he sleeps. We'll let you figure out when that's possible.

Experimenting with the game mechanics is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the Metal Gear games. The player is given a huge array of gadgets to play with, and the game designers have ensured just about everything that is remotely logical will work in the game world. Even ideas that are just downright kooky also work, thanks to their ability to second guess just what gamers might try to do. For instance, how many other videogames take into account that crouching down and punching a guard in the crotch will instantly

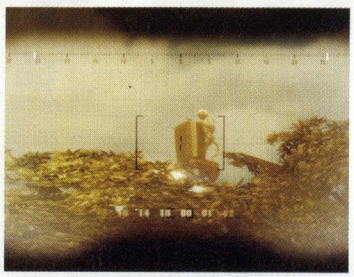
SNAKE VS MONKEY **In an amusing distraction from the main game, playing Snake Vs Monkey pits you against the crazy simians from Ape Escape. Snake must use stealth and gadgets to capture the monkeys as they hide and cavort about a variety of different levels. Particularly brilliant is the briefing Snake gets at the very beginning of this mini-game, proof that Kojima has a brilliant sense of humour.**




You've got to be one with the wood Snake


I love the sexy slither of the Hayter snake, oh baby

It's log, log, it's big it's heavy it's wood


[up] Yet another Horatio Hufnagel caption

stun them? Then there is the fact that actions you take at various points have a real impact on events later in the game - it's possible to even kill one of the bosses after a cutscene and no longer have to fight them later on when you're meant to; and it's not a glitch because the characters will even discuss that you managed to do it.

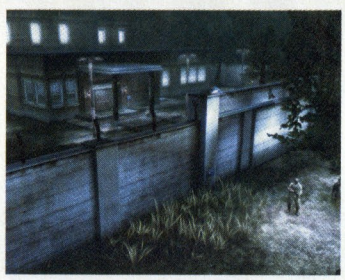
Snake can also use TNT to destroy various storerooms and armouries resulting in nearby guards getting hungry and shooting less to conserve their ammo. But it's all up to the player to figure this stuff out, and there's plenty more to discover, so don't feel as if we've given anything away. In fact, it's doubtful you'll ever see everything that is possible in Snake Eater, the game is that clever.

THE TASTE OF SNAKE

The biggest change to the Metal Gear gameplay with Snake Eater is the introduction of camouflage, and its impact on your ability to sneak. Snake now can carry various outfits and face paints that become necessary to achieving a high enough camouflage rating to blend him into the environment. There are a large number of camo suits to find, from practical outfits for snow, grass, forest, desert and rain camouflage, to useful disguises and highly unusual outfits to help you out in all manner of situations. There are also many hidden camos, and some can even be downloaded online.

Because the majority of Snake Eater takes place in the swamps, forests and mountains of Russia, Kojima has also introduced the concept of "survival". Snake now has a stamina meter that expires as he runs around and gets caught up in action. In fact, the more items you have equipped to your shoulder buttons (Snake can store large numbers of items in his backpack), the more Snake gets tired as he carries it around.

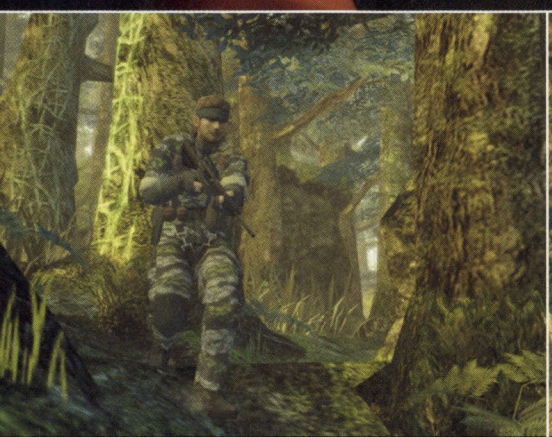
The only way to replenish stamina is to eat. A lot of the game's humour revolves around the fact that Snake can hunt and eat different animals (snakes, fish, rabbits etc), insects (spiders, scorpions etc) and plant life (mushrooms, fruit). The helpful Para-Medic will also give you information on anything you capture, with some creatures having a secondary use to just providing a meal. If you tranquilise an animal, you can even carry them in a cage, which not only keeps them fresh, but allows for you to "use" them on guards - such as throwing a live snake.


[in-jokes] Amos Tekken Crates Blau *dm*

[above] I know it's funny but I don't get it

SHOW ME WHERE IT HURTS To further enhance the concept of survival, Snake also has to learn how to treat his own wounds. The survival viewer gives you access to a "Cure" screen where you can use various medical equipment, ointments and drugs to tend to bullet wounds, cuts, burns and broken bones - even a stomach ache or common cold, should Snake somehow get one of those! It might seem daunting at first, but it's all very straightforward. Each wound requires different steps to heal, but you'll learn them soon enough. It really does add a nice layer to the game and help you really "feel" like Snake. Don't forget you may need to forage for medical supplies, or suffer wounds that eat away at your health.

We love reminding people that the voice of Snake, David Hayter, also wrote the screenplay for the first X-Men movie. What a cool guy.


Snake looks for the base of the Magic Faraway Tree

Snake hanging out, shooting the breeze

Hunting the deadliest prey of all... man

Foraging for food never becomes a chore, because it's rare that it's made a crucial part of the gameplay. The same can be said for the camouflage - you could play the whole game without changing your outfit once if you really wanted to. The great thing about Snake Eater is it allows the player to experiment to get the job done. Play by the rules, or ignore them completely and go about it your own way. Kojima will most likely provide you with an outcome for almost anything you try.

HOW BIG IS YOUR BOSS?

Snake is also a master of CQC (Close Quarters Combat), and learning its secrets plays a big part in becoming the ultimate agent. With CQC, a whole array of stylish moves can now be achieved when grappling with your enemy. Once your opponent is in range, you use the circle button to initiate anything from a simple punch to a foot-sweep knockdown. CQC also allows you to subdue and interrogate your foe, snap their neck, slit their throat, use them as a human shield, or throw them like a rag doll. Because the PS2's controller buttons are pressure sensitive, grabbing your foe without killing them requires a delicate touch - just as pressing the Square button lightly will draw your weapon without actually pulling the trigger. Questioning guards can reveal all sorts of info, such as enemy placement on the world map, secret radio frequencies, hints on the location of items, and even clues on how to beat the bosses.

[up] Poised to strike, like a... panther

The great thing about Snake Eater is it allows the player to experiment

Speaking of bosses... well, in terms of traditional boss fights, Snake Eater has got to have the coolest lineup of bosses yet. Each boss fight is refreshingly original in design and visual style, and they are without a doubt a highlight in the series. Thanks to the PAL version arriving a little later, when you finish the game you can also unlock the DUEL mode that allows you to replay any of the major battle scenes. You'll definitely want to replay these boss fights again, as they are some of the most stylish the series has seen. And if you like your videogames to end with a truly climactic and epic battle, then Snake Eater won't disappoint. In fact, continuing with Metal Gear tradition, the end of the game is suitably full of twists and outrageous fights, to the point where you won't quite believe that it just keeps on going, and going... It's wonderfully intense stuff.

So to get to the point, Snake Eater demands and deserves your utmost attention. It's the most artistic game in the series, and a must-have for any PS2 owner. Do we have a game of the year already? <<

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Stealth/Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Konami
PUBLISHER: Konami
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: March

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Oozes style, humour and intense gameplay. Great characters!

MINUS: Camera adjustment takes some getting used to.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
95	93	95

OVERALL
96

Genius. You will eat the snake, and love every bit of it.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: Dante's Awakening

MARCH STEPNIK loves a bit of cheese

Dante's Awakening is an excellent return to form for the young and in-experienced hack 'n' slash series. It's a game that acknowledges its broken past by not only bringing back the winning elements of the original Devil May Cry but by developing the ideas introduced in its troubled sequel and making them actually work.

The unequivocal disaster that was DMC2 serves to illustrate just how easy it is to spoil a game's mojo, and what made the original so good. It's really quite simple: DMC2 featured enemies that were altogether way too easy to decimate. Take away the challenge and more importantly the reward system of wasting thousands of beasties with style and DMC is nothing more than a linear stroll through gorgeously detailed dystopian environments (which are in turn strung together by a thoroughly incomprehensible storyline).

Even the bosses in DMC2 were far from taxing compared to the interesting bosses of the first - victory required not a helluva lot more than the morose button mashing needed for the many and countless underlings encountered in the rest of the game. Not cool.

TEEN-BRAT ROCK GOD

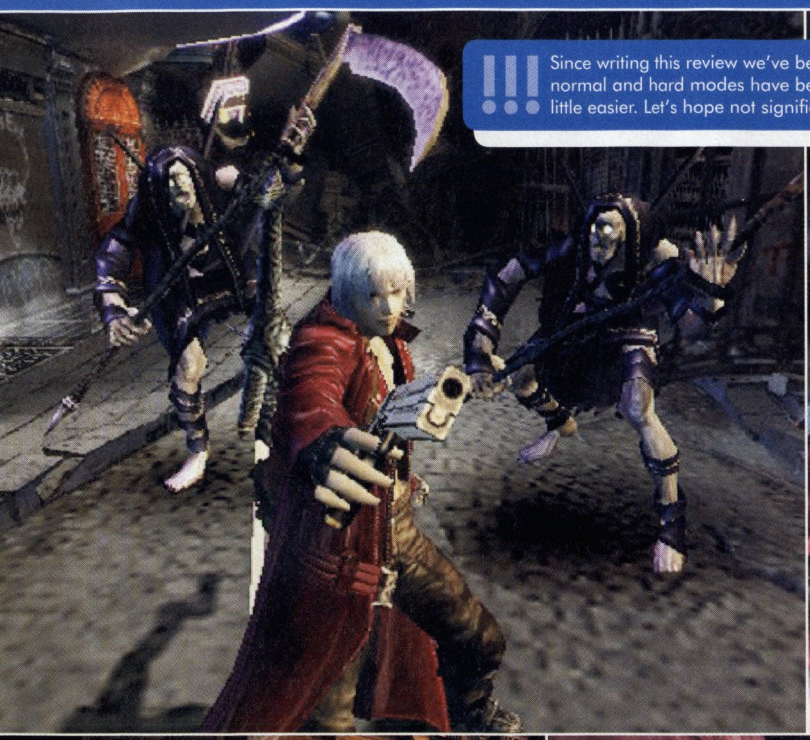
Serving as a prequel to DMC and DMC2, Dante's Awakening tells the story of Dante and his brother Vergel and their awakening to the prophetic powers within (you don't think being the progeny of a heroic Devil Knight who slew the all-powerful Devil Prince Mundus would come without a couple of significant snags now, do you?).

As such, Dante in this game is presented as a bit of a teen-brat rock god - a cocky character quite distinct from the dark, brooding and more mature figure portrayed in the previous two games. Apart from explaining his new appearance (his bare hairless chest, flat and thin hair a la Sephiroth from Final Fantasy VII Advent Children), this new take on DMC's central character is responsible for two very amusing things: what is perhaps the most cheesy cool opening action sequence for a videogame ever, and the groan-worthy monologues and asides - "This party's getting crazy - let's rock!" - that pepper the adventure. It can be quite jarring to fans of the series, but fear not, for Dante's quips mellow as the game progresses.

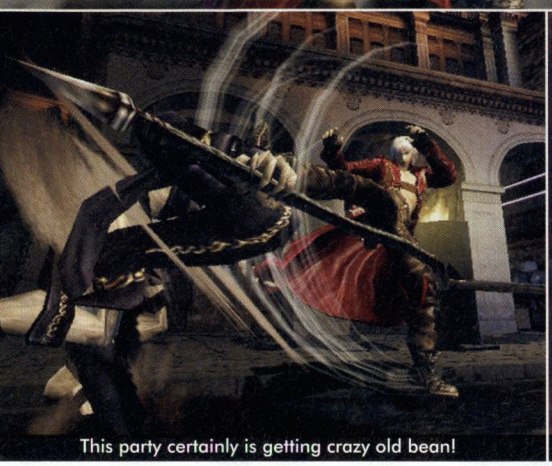
Anyway, Dante still wields dual guns (Ebony & Ivory) and a gigantic mutha of a sword (both of which can be upgraded and augmented by more powerful versions), and prances about with acrobatic ease. And he's still an absolute bad arse when it comes to being impaled by larger than life pointy implements.

Irrespective of how Dante looks and sounds, the core of a DMC game is all about crazy hack 'n' slash action set in gorgeously rendered nightmarish environments. And in this department, Dante's Awakening excels. The levels themselves are gorgeously designed. Linear yes, but dripping with high-res textures that paint the Gothic structures and organic Hell-gates with intriguing detail - so well done that each new area is a treat to explore. Capcom has also mastered the art of unified world design, having Dante return to previous areas to progress to different parts of the game - a simple trick but one that does wonders in bringing the locations of DMC3 to life. Puzzles are present but in minimal form and frequency - the perfect compliment to frantic action and a chance to stop and soak up the wonderful, ICO-inspired atmosphere.

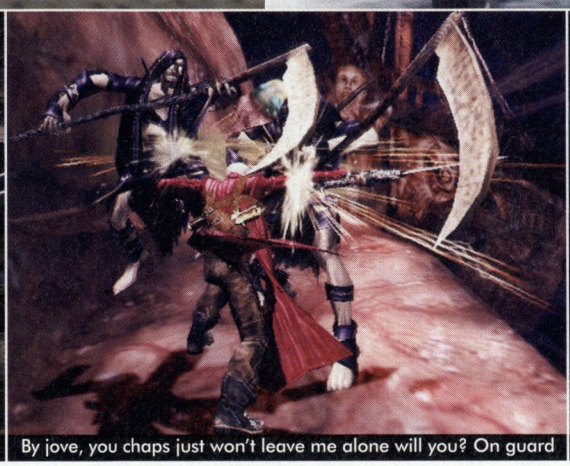
The monster design is also of the high standard set by the game's predecessors, with a collection of unique beasties that positively drip with creative vision. Some are also brilliantly voiced, so much so that Dante is frequently upstaged by



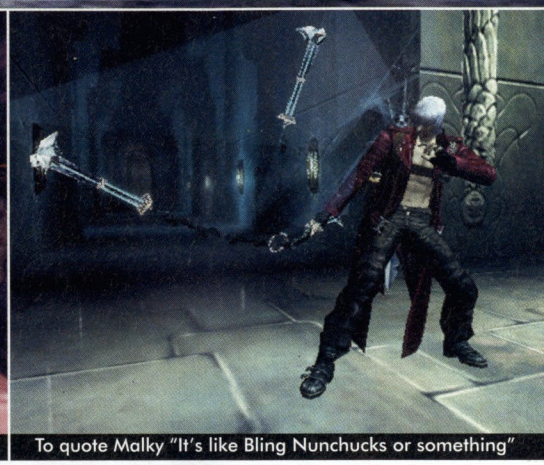
!!! Since writing this review we've been told normal and hard modes have been made a little easier. Let's hope not significantly so.



This party certainly is getting crazy old bean!



By jove, you chaps just won't leave me alone will you? On guard



To quote Malky "It's like Bling Nunchucks or something"

the excellent characterisation of certain bosses and secondary figures encountered throughout the game.

Otherwise, Dante's Awakening is much like the previous two games in regards to core content: enter an area, solve the puzzle/fight the score-or-so nasties in the room, collect the red orbs (which are spent on new attacks, weapon upgrades or useful magic items), fight awesome boss battles and repeat - with plenty more miscellaneous fighting in between.

The difficulty has also been ramped up, with DMC3's easy setting already more difficult than DMC2's normal one. It's a steady difficulty curve though; the first level will be more a lesson in stringing lucrative combos together than anything else. After that, enemies will progressively start to challenge not only your ability to quickly decimate but also to evade with class and style.

It's the Style system that makes Dante's Awakening feel so fresh

CRAZY-PARTY-ACTION

But it's the Style system - the ability to specialise in six different combat areas - that makes Dante's Awakening feel so fresh. Essentially a class system, Style dictates which repertoire of high-level combos will be available during combat (Style can be changed repeatedly throughout the game, but only at the beginning of each level and at the mid-level shrines). Dante always has access to his dedicated sword and gun attacks regardless of the style selected, while style-specific combos are let loose via the circle button.

The style system is an intelligent solution to the problem of depth versus complexity. There may be fewer attacks available at any one time but they require more skill to successfully complete, and are therefore more rewarding.

An interesting consequence of the style system is that combat in Dante's Awakening has a different flavour depending on the style selected, making strategic choices in Style essential and upping the replayability factor a notch or two.

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening is to DMC2 as Dante is to his enemies in combat. It leaps and bounds around its prey like a cat does with a mouse, and has a helluva good time doing it. So much so that Dante's teen-brat spats can be forgiven - DMC3 is one hell of a party. Let's rock. <<

STYLIN' **There are six combat styles on offer in DMC3. Gunslinger is for those players who like to take on enemies from a safe distance, while Swordmaster is perfect for Dantes who prefer a more intimate offensive style. Trickster adds a larger and more acrobatic repertoire of evasive manoeuvres to combat, and is perfect for players that like to play with their prey. For a real challenge, the sublime Royal Guard mode can't be beat: successful blocks of incoming attacks charges a power meter which when full allows you to unleash a powerful magic attack on your opponents. The final two styles, well, we'll let you discover those for yourself.**

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: March 25th

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Awesome action & characters, fantastic environments... just cool.

MINUS: Young Dante's a bit of a ponce, can be quite difficult.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	80	91

OVERALL
90

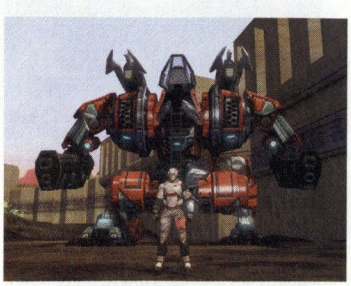
DMC's back, and this time it's worth paying attention.

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

MECHASSAULT 2: Lone Wolf

FRANK DRY is back with a vengeance

You all remember MechAssault right? It was the more arcadey spin-off of the MechWarrior series and was one of the first games to highlight the potential of Xbox Live. Despite essentially being a shoot anything that moves game, early Live subscribers were wowed by just how much fun it was hopping behind the control panel of a massive rocket and plasma spewing mechanised killing machine and dispensing death to other gamers across the globe. Simple pleasures, to be sure, to be sure.



[above] Sony's new Killer Aibo

A POT OF GOLD?

Now that Xbox Live is firmly established, with a cadre of great games to choose from, will MechAssault 2 be able to make the same kind of impression? Probably not, but anyone with a Live account will still get a major kick out of this installment, with a whole host of new game modes to choose from, much improved graphics and more varied core gameplay.

Before hopping onto Live, we warmed up by giving the single player campaign a spin. The first major change fans of the original will dig is that you're no longer confined to your mech. In fact, the first level kicks off with you in BattleArmor - a mech-lite exoskeleton that's only marginally bigger than your character. It's an appetite whetting opening section, as the BattleArmor is highly maneuverable, with a powerful jet-pack and the ability to latch onto the sides of buildings using its claw (which then gives you a launching point from which to fly up even higher). The BattleArmor is equipped with a laser and mortars, making it a devastating unit in the right hands.

But surely you're still at a disadvantage against fully armoured mechs right? Well I'm glad you (and by you I mean me) asked, because this introduces us to the next cool concept that Lone Wolf brings to the table - Mech Hacking. Just jump at an enemy mech and you can grab onto them and disable the pilot's control, allowing you to get out of your BattleArmor and into the enemy mech. Sweet huh? And you can do it in multiplayer too.

You're also able to get out of whatever mech/vehicle you're controlling at any time now, just don't do it while under a storm of plasma fire because you won't last long running around the battlefield. Puny human. What it does mean though, is that you're able to change vehicles more often, and there is even

[Eliot-style] Don't mech me cranky

[machine love] Want to mech out?

!!! Lone Wolf features music by Papa Roach and Korn. Do with that information what you will.

Hanging out, shooting the... damn, used that one already

Is that the Masked Unit in the background?

Jumping Flash 3: Destruction on Planet MuuMuu

a level based around getting into an enemy base (by hitching a ride on a VTOL and dropping in) and walking out with a few of their mechs to give your crew some more firepower. It's a good way of introducing more variety, as well as reinforcing a sense of scale - something sorely lacking from many mech games.

GETTING YOUR FRAG ON

Of course, the single player game will only last so long, and in Lone Wolf's case the end is a little premature - although the acquisition of increasingly powerful artillery will keep most entertained for the duration. Fortunately, that's only the appetiser - Live play is definitely the main draw. The game modes include Destruction, Team Destruction, Capture the Flag, Last Man Standing, Last Team Standing, Not It (only the player who is "it" can score points for kills), Snatch It (bring the data cores back to base), Check It (gain and defend five checkpoints) and Base War (fight to be "crack kingpin", or maybe it's defending your base's generator and attacking the enemy's). While not being stunningly original, these game types offer a very solid multiplayer experience, and the range of maps, mechs and vehicles, not to mention the focus on teamwork that vehicles like the VTOL can bring to the table, make for some great battles.

» The BattleArmor is highly maneuverable with a powerful jet-pack

What we're really excited about, however, is Conquest mode. In it you must sign on as one of several "Houses", and starting from your home planet gradually move across the grid of planets to dominate the map. Each planet has its own rules, so Conquest is a good way to play all the team-based game types in a context where the end result actually matters. Unfortunately it's too early to judge just how well Conquest will work, but it's a great idea in theory. Fingers crossed it lives up to potential.

As if blowing stuff up wasn't its own reward, Lone Wolf also looks great while you're doing it - the reinforced metal gleams on the surface of each mech, rocket trails twist hypnotically through the air and collateral damage to buildings and structures is earth shattering. There's just nothing like razing a city to the ground. You know you want to. <<

NEW STUFF There are 35 vehicles in MechAssault 2, including six new mechs (Stiletto, Raptor, NovaCat, Blood Asp, Wendigo and Star Adder) and three new vehicles (BattleArmor, Tank and VTOL) - all of which feature in both single and multiplayer. It's the last three that really add spice to the MechAssault 2 experience. The VTOL in particular is an invaluable inclusion, allowing you to ferry players in BattleArmor, not to mention tanks, turrets and supplies into enemy territory. Throw in a variety of new offensive and defensive pickups and you've got a much more interesting take on the original MechAssault experience.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / **XBOX** / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1-12
DEVELOPER: Day 1 Studios
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Looks great, a blast online.

MINUS: Single player game is way too short, boring story, slowdown.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	84	85

OVERALL
86

Chunky mech fun, but a Live account is a must!

ODDWORLD: Stranger's Wrath

CAM SHEA thinks Stranger is the best bounty hunter since Faye

Set in a very Oddworld incarnation of the Wild West, Stranger's Wrath is a great return to form for Oddworld Inhabitants. You play as Stranger, a bounty hunter with a mysterious condition that's going to require a very expensive operation. In some ways he's your typical Western hero - impossibly tough and with a gruff voiced economy of speech that shows he's a man with a purpose, but also allows for some utterly dry one liners. Of course, the word "man" should be taken with a big grain of salt. There's no such thing in Oddworld. Instead, we have a bounty hunter that's part John Wayne and part mangy lion with a wrist-mounted crossbow that literally fires "live" ammo. We have enemies that look like the twisted creations of Impossible Creatures - part Hunchback of Notre Dame and part cane toad. We have towns and farms full of chicken-folk known as Clakkerz, and a big bad with those two staples of Oddworld bad guy design - a huge cigar and massive suit.

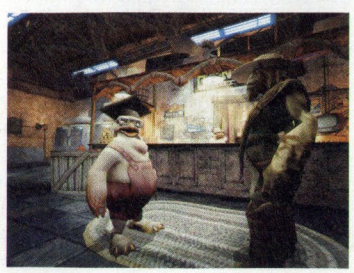
LIVING, BREATHING FREAKS

It's a world that Oddworld fans will feel instantly at home in, and as a package has a tremendously unified design, both in gameplay and in art direction. What we mean is that Oddworld's game world feels very much like a living breathing place, with a consistent internal logic - and that's quite an achievement for such a bizarre world. It's a game that doesn't over extend itself either - Stranger's Wrath doesn't stray too far from gameplay conventions, and it's better for it. Its strengths lie in its lively and well designed game world full of unique characters and weaponry, not in gameplay innovation.

The game is based around a series of towns, from which you'll choose bounties, purchase upgrades and get advice from the locals. Once you've accepted a mission it's usually a short venture out of town to find the villain's hideout. Thus, Stranger's Wrath is still very much a "go here, kill this" game, but what keeps it entertaining is the sandbox approach Oddworld Inhabitants have taken in level design and weapon design. As mentioned earlier, Stranger has a wrist-mounted crossbow that fires alive ammo - you literally hunt down critters, strap 'em in and shoot 'em at the enemy. Despite sounding gimmicky, it works wonderfully, and there's a great selection. You can set traps with Fuzzles, lure enemies away from the pack with the wise cracking Chippunks, immobilise them with Bolamites, knock them down with Thudslugs, blow them up with Boombats, make them vomit with Stunkz and even pepper them with your rapid fire bee gun, the Stingbee. Ammo types are upgradeable too, so by the end of the game you'll be getting

[above] Dear Diary, I totally hate Wilks

[up] Deck the halls with bowels of rats



Stranger has both a health bar and stamina bar. He can literally "shake off" damage, which will deplete his stamina bar, although fortunately it gradually recovers.

Stranger things have happened...

The Stingbee - the power of tiny pricks in your hand

You shouldn't have followed him down the rabbit hole...

into some really major firefights.

All ammo types need to be hunted (or purchased) aside from your Zappfly, a creature that shoots electrical pulses that is essentially the shotgun of the game. What's clever about the system is that you can have two ammo types equipped at once (and swapping is only an intuitive menu setup away), so much of the gameplay comes from working out when to use particular ammo types and what the most effective pairings are. Do you want to play it safe and lure out enemies one by one with Chippunks before knocking them out with the Zappfly and bountying them? Or will you spam the area with Fuzzles before charging into the resulting confusion loosing off Boombats in all directions? It's up to you, and the fact that you'll be happy to replay an area a few times, trying different approaches is always a good sign.

You hunt down critters, strap 'em in and shoot 'em at the enemy

WHEN THEY BARK THEY SHOOT BEES

You can take in enemies (whether bosses or grunts) dead or alive, with a greater reward for capturing living enemies. Once you've killed or knocked out a foe, it's a simple matter of sucking them up with your wrist-mounted vacuum cleaner (resulting in a fantastic "pop" sound effect) and then cashing them in at the bounty store next time you're back in town. Taking in bosses alive makes for a fun additional challenge, as you'll need to focus more on wearing down their stamina than their health bar.

Another great example of Oddworld's unified design is the (largely) seamless combination of both first and third person perspectives. Stranger's animal form is well utilised in third person, allowing you to bound along on all fours, leaping from ledge to ledge, knocking down enemies and quickly changing direction. You'll have to switch to first person if you want to use that crossbow, however, and this gives you greater accuracy and the all-important ability to strafe. Great stuff. <<

SWEET FANCY MOSES **As you'd expect from Oddworld Inhabitants, Stranger's Wrath is nothing short of visually stunning. There's just so much character wrapped up the locations, from the archetypal abandoned mining towns with mine tracks criss crossing above, rusted structures with corrugated iron roofs to each side and dust storms barreling down the streets, through to more prosperous townships with Clakkerz running to and fro, neon signs flashing and machinery clicking away. It's not all typical Wild West either, with a liberal dash of jungle environments thrown in, and a return to a more typical industrial world for the game's last act.**

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / **XBOX** / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Odd Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Oddworld Inhabitants
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Open levels, cool ammo, stunning visuals and design.

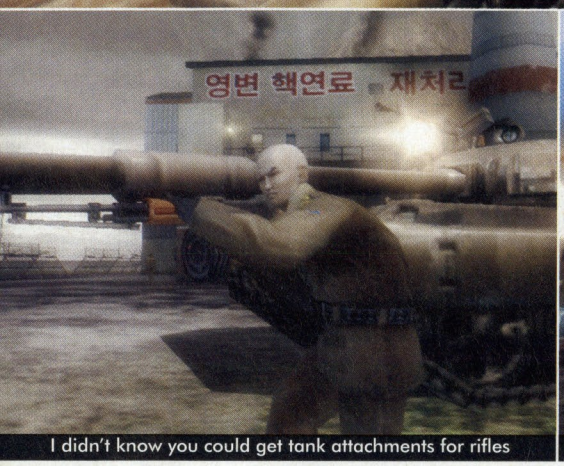
MINUS: Sometimes sticky camera, might seem a little repetitive to some.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	86	88

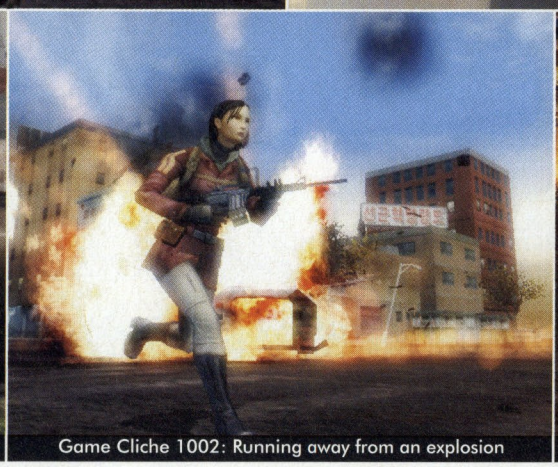
OVERALL
89

The best Old West themed game of recent years.

Not only can you get four wheeled friends to help you out, artillery and air support is a mere radio call (and cash debit) away.



I didn't know you could get tank attachments for rifles



Game Cliche 1002: Running away from an explosion

America, f**k yeah!

MERCENARIES

BENNETT RING takes on the crazy North Korean synchronised dancing army.

If ever an opening paragraph could doom a gaming journo to a fate of reviewing animal suppositories in a veterinary magazine, this is it. Gulp, here goes: I can see why San Andreas proved so popular. Problem is, I just didn't get into it. I loved the idea of having a massive virtual playground to conquer with my crew of gang-banging homeboyz, chock full of biznatches and crack whores just begging for a dose of 9mm lovin'. But to me it felt like a collection of very average mini-games. A huge collection of games certainly, but none of them really gripped me. Bring on the flame mails. So I wasn't expecting to find Mercenaries, which follows the same sandbox principle, to be one of the most interesting and innovative action games that I've seen in recent years.

FO' SHIZZLE

Perhaps it's because Mercenaries doesn't try to be so ambitious that I found it to be a much more satisfying experience. It still uses the same open-ended, plonk-the-player-in-a-virtual-world game design, but there aren't quite as many different things to do. Or perhaps it's the fact that I'm a huge military nut, and have the 2005 "Bikinis 'n' Bazookas" calendar sitting over my monitor, that I found the war setting more attractive.

Set in North Korea, the playing area in this game isn't the Bondi beach of a sandbox that San Andreas is. Yet while it's much smaller, it's still sizeable enough that it will take several days to cover every square meter. The main task is to capture or kill over 50 top ranking Korean officials, but this is barely the icing on the cake. This war-ravaged landscape is populated by five different competing factions. Each of these groups could use a hand and will offer you missions, and in return you'll score cold hard cash, which you can use to purchase more things that go boom. But things get a little tricky, as some missions involve beating on rival factions, so it's up to you to decide which one you'll be friendly to.

Both the faction missions and capture missions have one thing in common - like GTA:SA you're given a massive range of options about how to complete them. Should you assassinate your target with a sniper rifle from afar, call in an artillery or air strike, roll over the top of him with a tank, or plant a bomb in the path of his convoy? The combat is immensely more satisfying than GTA:SA's thanks to super-tight controls, sexy graphics and a surprisingly deep physics system. And that's what this game is all about - combat in a large open environment, with a variety of choices as to how to proceed.

While it doesn't have quite the depth of GTA: SA, the few areas (mainly combat) that Mercenaries does, it does exceedingly well. One of the finest action games of recent years. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Pandemic
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Similar in style to GTA:SA, but with much tighter combat.

MINUS: Doesn't have as much variety or depth as GTA:SA.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	90	92

OVERALL
90

More action, less working out. We like.

SVC CHAOS
SNK VS. CAPCOM

Not a Match. Struggle!!

Pepare for the ultimate battle as SNK takes on CAPCOM

Select characters from some of the arcades biggest franchises such as: King of Fighters, Fatal Fury, Samurai Shodown, Dark Stalkers and Street Fighter, and then slug it out to see who will win this ultimate battle of survival...

36 characters taken from SNK's and CAPCOM's most popular franchises

Hidden characters to unlock!

Multiple modes of play including Arcade, Versus and Practice

Go beyond the Super Special move with the exclusive Exceed Move to inflict massive damage

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PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

ELIOT FISH cloaks up and slips away unnoticed...

So the story goes, Project: Snowblind started out as a console spin-off from the lauded Deus Ex series. At some point in its development, Eidos decided that it should be a standalone product, and thus its connection to the futuristic world of JC Denton and friends was severed. Instead, we have... well, a futuristic world and an augmented agent going by the name of Nathan Frost. Instead of Denton's low-key mysterious demeanour, we have Frost's All-American Action Hero approach to videogame characters.

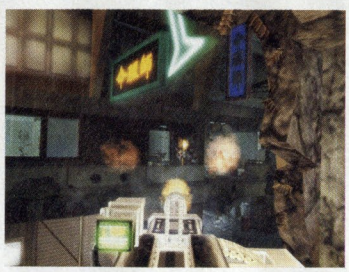
[so bad] Welcome to Frag-gle Rock

Yes, you could say that Project: Snowblind is what you'd get if you put a copy of Deus Ex in a blender with a gallon of vintage cheese.

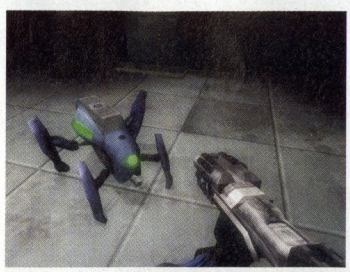
MOD ME UP

Project: Snowblind certainly tries very hard to be cool. There is a gravity gun. Need we say more? In an attempt to incorporate bits from all the great shooters, some of the basics of good game design have slipped through the cracks. For starters, the character models (and personalities) are rather generic and bland. There are no real characters here to be interested in, as hard as the game tries to sell its story to you. Your character, Nathan Frost, is just a dull futuristic grunt who wants to strut around, blow away the bad guys and chew gum. There's nothing remotely interesting about him, other than what actually happens to him - a bomb blast that results in him being augmented with nano-powers during emergency surgery. Other that that, he's a bit of a dickhead.

Project: Snowblind borrows all the same gameplay ideas from the Deus Ex series, incorporating full-on shoot outs with slow-paced sneaking, a spot of hacking, and some droid dominance for good measure. For example, the game's Ice Pick gun replaces the Deus Ex Multitool, which gives you the opportunity to hack computer terminals and security panels to disable cameras, override gun turrets and open doors. It can also be used on security mechs to override the AI and manually control them into battle against their owners. Your bio-augs can also be kicked in when needed, giving you the power to slow down the action, put up a defensive energy shield, see enemies through walls, cloak yourself temporarily and so on. But all these gadgets, powers and guns somehow don't add up to a game that's remotely as interesting or engaging as Deus Ex, even



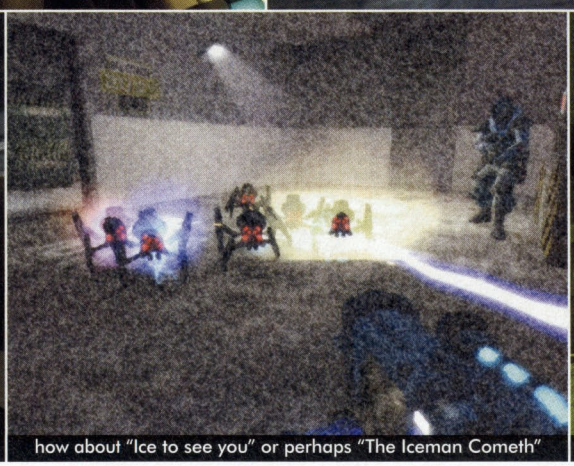
[abvoe] "It's snow picnic out there"



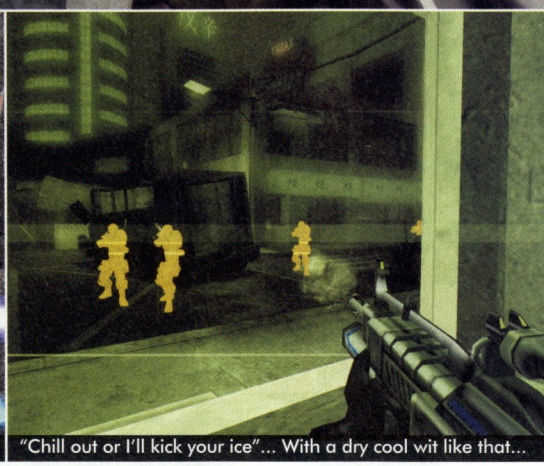
[below] All men love big bazookas

"Snowblind" is in reference to an EMP attack on an augmented soldier, disabling their bio-mechanical systems and leaving them vulnerable on the battlefield.

With a hero called Frost there's plenty of one-liner potential:



how about "Ice to see you" or perhaps "The Iceman Cometh"



"Chill out or I'll kick your ice"... With a dry cool wit like that...

though the potential is there. Why is this? We've already mentioned the poor characters, but the other culprits would be weak level design and frustrating enemy AI.

Sure, there has been a strong attempt to give the player 'non-linear' levels to allow them to exploit the gameplay variety on hand - air ducts allow you to get from A to B without conflict, and some areas are inaccessible without a bit of planning or careful observation of the environment - but the design never really fosters creative gameplay. The player is still shoe-horned into action, and there are no true puzzles to speak of.

SQUEAKY SNEAKERS

When it comes to stealth, the flaws in the enemy AI become all too apparent. Guards seem to have psychic powers when it comes to spotting you. Even when crouched behind crates and staring down a long hallway at a guard patrolling off in the distance, that same guard will somehow be triggered to your presence and run to set off the alarm. In many cases, it seems as soon as you can see them, they can see you, which pretty much makes stealth a broken component of this game. Thankfully, a cloaking aug becomes available, although it only makes you invisible temporarily, so getting to a spot where you won't suddenly be noticed actually becomes another frustratingly difficult task. Whilst your pistol is silenced, you also can't seem to take down a single guard without the whole place going into red alert. It's as if the only lessons they learned from making this Deus Ex spin-off was to give the player plenty of tools to inspire clever gameplay, without actually designing the game in such a way that this kind of gameplay is possible to achieve.

There is too much bubblegum shooter action thrown at the player

There are moments when Project: Snowblind is a refreshingly different shooter - such as commandeering mechs, sending forth an army of spider-bots, or jumping into vehicles for high-speed mayhem, but on the whole there is too much bubblegum shooter action thrown at the player, and not enough thoughtful exploration or puzzle solving. The pace of the game is so chaotic that there never really feels like there's an opportunity for the player to use any tricks or traps and fully utilise their bio-augs and weapons to thwart the enemy AI or take advantage of the level design.

The small irony here is that if judged against the majority of mediocre shooters out there, Project: Snowblind has enough variety and futuristic toys to edge it slightly ahead of the pack. The frustration is that it doesn't properly exploit the game mechanics that it has inherited from its Deus Ex origins, and all we have here is another sci-fi shooter that will probably be forgotten in six months time. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics
PUBLISHER: Eidos
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: March

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Plenty of cool gadgets and powers to make this interesting.

MINUS: Level design, enemy AI that triggers too easily, weak characters.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	80	76

OVERALL
77

A solid shooter that had the potential to be so much more.

What's the difference between art and pornography?

...A government grant!

Hey, isn't that the Reverse Umbrella?

RUMBLE ROSES

JOHN DEWHURST thinks Germaine Greer must be rolling around in her grave

I remember back in the day, us kids sneaking a peak at Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards, in about three colours while my mate's dad mowed the lawn. Oh, the trepidation! Who were the Beatles? What was a French Letter? Who is this sultry woman at the top of the stairs who keeps killing me with VD? Thankfully, to scratch their cherries these days, young boys need only turn to DoA or Extreme Beach Volleyball or any videogame. In this grand tradition comes Rumble Roses.

THAT'S GOOD SQUISHY...

Here's a game that emphasises the T&A over the possibly more noble pursuit of a fine gaming experience. These girls are pretty stunning. There's the young perky teens, the big buxom blondes, the fetish masks. The girls are decked out in decorative outfits designed for panty shots. Of course, their curves are impossibly perfect as is the naïve, come-hither attitude of these vixens, as they roll around in each other's arm pits. If... "ahem"... arousal's your thing then, Rumble Roses delivers so to speak. The moves are preposterously designed to display the wiggling, jiggling assets of the contestants. There's a mud wrestling option that allows the girls to basically become skin tone for your viewing pleasure.

Konami's foray into bikini babes is as predictable as the response of say, A Current Affair. It's purpose is to display the female anatomy, the game coming a distant second to that. Here's a game that is in practise "Mash-tastic". There's some depth here for the wrestling fans, with the Roses varying in abilities from speedy offensive types to defensive submission experts, with a range of different kinds of finishing moves. You can target different areas of the body to soften up your opponent. Say, only the arm, leg or head. It's much easier though to just use a Killer Move.

Beating the crap out of your opponents using blows, holds and throws will build up your Killer Move metre. Once achieved, unlease this awesome power with L1. Killer Moves take no skill to unleash, are a pretty good way to secure a pinfall and are rarely reversed. You can also use humiliation moves to beat your opponent.

Now I love breasts as much as the next heterosexual male but Rumble Roses is a little disappointing. All the girls are a little too samey in their styles and it's a little slim on battle options. More to the point, there's a swag of better wrestling games - and better fighting games, for that matter - on the PS2. If you can see past the giant cups and the spread-eagled submission holds, this is a pretty bland wrestling game. My advice? Get your sorry arse out of your living room, into a dance party and meet a real woman. Rumble Roses is an easy, mildly fun but finally forgettable brawler. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Titty bar Wrestling
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Konami
PUBLISHER: Konami
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Passable wrestling with giant titties.

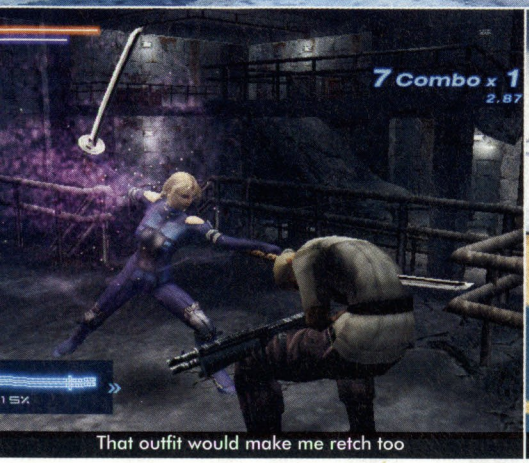
MINUS: Repetitive characters, little variety in play options.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	65	76

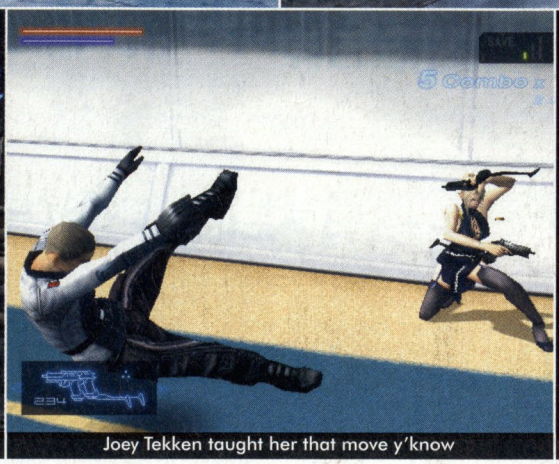
OVERALL
73

Breasts for the wrestling fans.

Check out the U.K. comedy series "Spaced" for a cool tribute to Tekken. And Resident Evil. Awesome show.



That outfit would make me retch too



Joey Tekken taught her that move y'know

"But Doctor, I haven't injected the dye yet!"

DEATH BY DEGREES

Starring **JOHN DEWHURST** as Lady and Nina Williams as the tramp

The offspring of fighting games don't have a great history. Anyone remember Mortal Kombat Mythologies with Sub-Zero? Didn't think so. On paper, it looks like a great idea: take popular fighting character, thrust him/her into another world and shazam! Ten-year-olds everywhere literally piss their parents' money into your hands. The problem is that the balance of characters in any fighting game is what makes them interesting. Sub-Zero isn't that interesting without Johnny Cage and Kitana to bounce off.

INTERNATIONAL ASSASSIN

Death by Degrees is the first spin-off of the Tekken series. This 3D brawler, starring international assassin Nina Williams, takes a slightly different approach. Nina's a fighter and assassin so the games involves fighting, infiltration and some puzzle solving, all in a largely fixed camera third person perspective.

The basic combat controls are good. The left analog stick is for movement, the right is for attacks. Nina is often outnumbered in combat, so that chance to choose the directions of your attacks on the fly is a good solution, and a little more freewheeling than the usual "lock-on" system alternative. Nina can make use of submission holds, powered up super attacks and weapons. Melee weapons like swords and nightsticks take damage and eventually expire, so there's a constant turnover of equipment and battle options.

Combat is fairly well conceived. Judging the approach of enemies and deciding who to deal with first approaches the brawling martial art mystique of Hong Kong cinema. Kick this bloke, grab that one, throw him, and on and on. Sadly, it's all a bit repetitive and non-intuitive. The basic tactic of running away and letting the gang follow you renders the game stupidly easy.

Following the Demtel logic of bang for your buck, developers Namco decided that a 3D fighter wasn't enough so they included spy type diversions: swimming and sniping. These inclusions are a mixed bag, although the sniper rifle is a good change of pace and the controls work well.

Certainly the biggest problem with Death By Degrees is the camera controls.The fixed camera for most arenas can be toggled to an over-the-shoulder view but there's a mystifying level of confusion that reigns here. Frequently, Nina will be fighting someone and disappear behind a grand piano or some other obstruction. Go to first person and your view is cemented to whatever direction Nina's facing. It's a little nauseating.

The concept, basic design and extensive video interludes are top notch, as you'd expect from Namco. It's a pity that there's polish missing from the play balance of Death by Degrees. They definitely needed a longer testing cycle.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: TBA
AVAILABLE: March 17

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fun combat, puzzles, swimming, sniping - shazam!

MINUS: Feels a little broken, camera's poor, repetitive combat.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	65	58

OVERALL
66

Is Joey Tekken losing his touch?

BATEN KAITOS Eternal Wings and the Lost Ocean

STEPHEN FARRELLY wants to make a Baten Kaitos fan sub

After the engaging Tales of Symphonia and the addictive, alluring quirkiness of Paper Mario, Namco's forthcoming Baten Kaitos had a lot to live up to in the RPG stakes, especially given the genre's lacking presence on the console at hand. Promising more than 60 hours of gameplay across two discs, stunning visuals, a unique battle system and plenty of intriguing plot twists, Baten Kaitos sounded like a formula for success, and on many levels the game is a triumphant leader in the changing of RPG ideas, but the thick and convoluted plot along with its shallow, predictable characters makes this trek an arduous one that will test the courage and will-power of both RPG enthusiasts and Nintendo fans alike.

BATEN FANTASY

Let's check the RPG cliché manifesto, shall we? Reluctant, good looking hero who doesn't know his place in the grand scheme? Present. Mysterious companion with more power than she realises who is infatuated with reluctant hero? Present. Ancient evil just waiting to be unleashed? Present. Evil empire thwarting our party at every turn? Present. Themed locations with equally themed bosses of immense size and power? Present.

So you may be getting the idea we feel Baten Kaitos follows all the RPG narrative rules and truisms; well, it does, which is a bit of a shame in the grander scheme of gaming as the art direction and visual presentation throughout Baten Kaitos is nothing short of breathtaking and could have been a wonderful representative for a unique and evolutionary story, paralleling the game's inimitable battle and item management system, but I digress.

Kalas, the game's protagonist, awakes to find himself in a doctor's quarters, he has little memory of what got him there, and as his guardian spirit and life companion, you are just as lost for details (more on this shortly). After an introduction from the doctor and a small explanation of the game's narrative and exploration style, you take control of Kalas and learn of his plight for revenge and that you are in fact a guardian spirit who has attached himself to Kalas.

The 'Guardian Spirit' angle allows the game to put you in control of a lot of the character development as certain responses from you will help shape the relationships between characters in your party and your relationship with Kalas. Although this idea is poorly explained early on, it's still cool nonetheless.

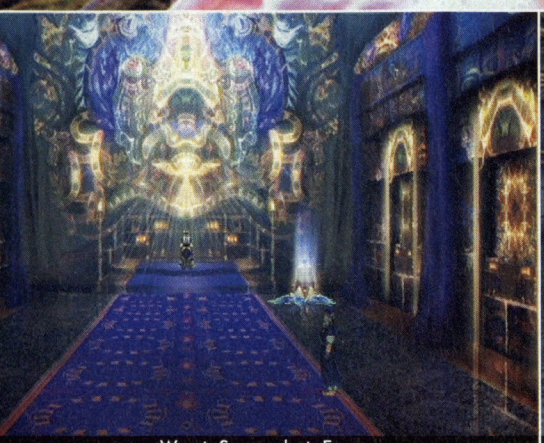
[PaRappa] Kick punch it's all in the mind

[up] Keep your melons away from me!

NEXT-GEN ISOMETRIC

Like most traditional console RPGs, Baten Kaitos takes place in an isometric, birds-eye view styled level set-up, giving a reasonably good idea of where you are, what paths are in front of you, and what enemies are on the field.

Unfortunately there are no overly lengthy FMV sequences in the game like Final Fantasy, although an intro video does show off some pretty spectacular CG. It would have been nice if it were used throughout to propel the story a little more.



Worst. Screenshot. Ever.

Now Kyle, don't fly too close to the sun

Never take a deck of cards to a sword fight

This presentation has also allowed for some very sweet graphics as much of this presentation is pre-rendered, meaning the game has a very fantasy story-book feel to it, and helps immeasurably in the way of drawing you into the Baten Kaitos story.

The greatest strength of Baten Kaitos, however, is definitely its unique item management system and battle set-up. Everything works through a card collection, but don't be fooled, this isn't Yu-Gi-Oh or Dual Masters, the complexity Baten Kaitos presents with its card system is both engaging and downright scary.

Each character has a number of cards they can carry, which changes based on your class and level. In battle, a hand is available based on your class and using the right combination of cards can produce a devastating combo or a powerful finisher. Moreover, cards can be used for defensive purposes and the right combo of defense cards can be the difference between life and death. However, given the card order is random it's sometimes difficult to get any powerful offensive or defensive combos happening, which has a tendency to prolong battles and up the frustration factor ten-fold.

» To change class and level you'll have to visit a church and pray

Cards aren't just for battle though, and most things you need in the game can be captured on blank "Magnus Cards" and then accessed via the C-stick for quick use. This helps immeasurably in the side-quest department (of which Baten Kaitos has a lot) and keeps the gameplay easily accessible.

Levelling up and changing classes is achieved a little differently than most RPGs in that your characters will earn experience points, but in order to change class and level you'll have to visit a church and pray, then level-up or change class manually - there's no real advantage to this save your constant awareness of each character's powers, which, given the size and length of the game is a good thing.

Baten Kaitos has an interesting battle system and the use of particular cards in the right sequence is an excellent discovery feature, but the shallow characters and predictable plot can make this a tough journey to get through. Given there are no 'true' RPGs on GameCube, it is a bitter sweet journey for Ninty fans, RPG nuts will also find a lot here, but don't say we didn't warn you of the onerous task ahead. <<

MISADVENTURES IN VOICE ACTING **Baten Kaitos is a mixed bag aurally: sound-effects are fairly sub-standard and oft times sound absolutely horrific, while the game's soundtrack is absolutely stunning with an eclectic and varied array of tracks, each with their own charm and theme which works wonderfully off the game's art-direction. Unfortunately, this is completely offset by the voice-acting - listening to rusty nails shred up a chalkboard would definitely be a more pleasant way to spend your listening time - so we recommend you turn it off in the options menu and let's never speak of it again.**

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Namco
PRICE: $TBA
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Stunning visuals, unique battle system and item management set-up.

MINUS: Predictable story, shallow characters and lengthy battles.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	78	79

OVERALL
80

Another exclusive to fill the void but you'll need patience.

THE PUNISHER

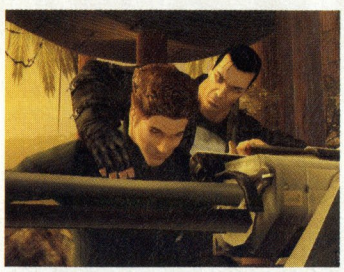
DANIEL WILKS is on a bloody trail of vengeance

Throughout his career as a comic book character, Frank Castle, The Punisher has seen a series of highs and lows, with obvious lows including the death of his entire family at the hands of the mob, the Dolph Lundgren movie and the fact that he had a fat comic relief sidekick throughout the late 80s and early 90s. High points, such as the gender bending, Daredevil loving killer Russian, a woman with no arms and legs (after having them eaten off by angry polar bears) screaming that with god as her witness she "will walk again!" and the torture of Spacker Dave all have one thing in common. That thing is the creative genius of Garth Ennis, one of the true visionaries of modern comics, the man who also wrote the story and much of the dialogue for the game. This alone should make The Punisher something pretty special but unfortunately the action just can't quite stack up.

TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN

The biggest disappointment of The Punisher is that after a strong beginning the action never really ramps up to any significant degree. Played in third-person perspective as Frank Castle, The Punisher leads players through a number of missions, told in flashback style from a police interrogation room where the anti-hero languishes calmly awaiting his fate after (assumedly) killing his way to the top of the vigilante food chain. Armed with a number of guns and a seemingly endless supply of knives, each level sees the player tracking down criminals on their home turf and shooting legions of fat, ugly or just plain stupid polyester clad mob mooks.

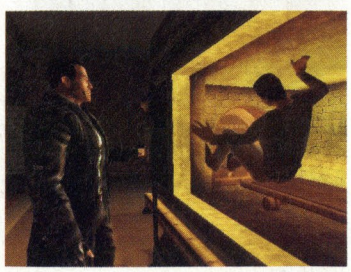
Aside from simply gunning down enemies, The Punisher also allows players to take hostages for human shields, interrogate captives for information using some subtle physical coercion such as bashing their faces against the ground or executing them by moving up nice and close and hitting the quick kill button. The quick kill is probably the most problematic point of the game - at all but the highest difficulty level it's easier and safer to simply run up to the majority of enemies and execute them than it is to shoot them from a distance. The environment often comes into play with executions and interrogations as there are certain areas highlighted by glowing skulls that can be used for unique kills and animations such as killing a guy by throwing him into a coffin along with a live grenade or putting a mook into a crematory oven and slowly turning up the heat to "grill" him for information. If nothing else, these unique animations give



[up] "It's okay to be nervous your first time"

[above] The Paaanchisher in action

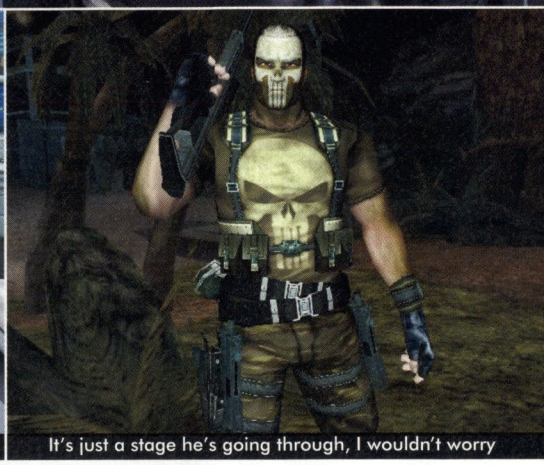
[below] The other other white meat



It may have been toned down for the OFLC but The Punisher has lost nothing.

Matt "Punisher" Reekie goes sick in bourgeois haven Railz

"You're half the man you used to be"



It's just a stage he's going through, I wouldn't worry

the player impetus to play through the game just to see them all.

Frank Castle also has the ability to enter a bullet-time-esque mode in which he drops his weapons and instead uses his unlimited supply of knives to slaughter enemies, either by throwing them or getting up close and personal and sticking them places where they hurt. Whilst in this mode The Punisher also slowly regains health, a handy feature in the hardest setting but fairly redundant in the others due to the fact that enemies don't cause too much of a problem. There are also a number of boss battles dotted across the stages featuring some lesser known villains from the Marvel universe but unfortunately the majority of these simply follow a set path so after a little practice you will be taking them out with relative ease.

Rather than being "neutered", The Punisher looks clever and stylish

CROSSING THE LINE

There seems to have been a fair bit of backlash in the press for the toning down of the more extreme violence in the game by either changing the camera angle or fading to black and white for some of the more gory kills but such criticism is unfounded. When we first saw the game with violence intact The Punisher was quite a distasteful experience - there's only so much detail you want to see when someone is being curb-stomped and it's quite safe to say that the original version crossed the line to a significant degree. Now, through the use of clever obscuring through the camera or switching to black and white, The Punisher manages to retain all of its brutality without having to resort to grotesque visuals. Rather than being "neutered" as one website put it, The Punisher looks clever and stylish.

The graphics engine does quite a competent job with a few strange exceptions - the Punisher model is exceptionally good but the vast majority of enemies seem to lack animation for their upper bodies, many of the levels contain some excellent detail whilst others show some alarmingly low resolution textures. It's strange, but overall is quite an attractive little game. As mentioned earlier, the unique execution and interrogation animations are really quite good, especially when good old Frank gets a little inventive such as lifting a mook into a spinning fan or the aforementioned crematory oven cooking. Voice acting is universally quite good with Thomas Jane reprising his role from the film and doing a much better job since we no longer have to look at him. Some of the death screams will have you chucking as well. <<

UNLOCKABLES **Each level of The Punisher features a number of modes/weapons and powerups that can bought/earned through reaching score thresholds. Scores can be racked up by killing enemies in quick succession, quick kills, interrogations and the like. The extra content is a nice touch but after completing the game most players (unless they're die-hard Punisher fans) will find little impetus to replay levels to garner the requisite point scores to unlock all the bonus content. It's just too repetitive.**

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Third Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Volition
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Some great animations, better than the movie(s), Garth Ennis script.

MINUS: Samey, repetitive, unchallenging.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81	83	76

OVERALL
76

Gets a little too samey.

BLOOD WILL TELL

DANIEL WILKS has keyboards for hands and a cuisinart for a brain

There are so many good things about Blood Will Tell - the brilliant and compelling storyline by Osamu Tezuka (the genius behind Astroboy), the fantastic main character and his progression throughout the story, the simple yet incredibly good combo system, the variation of enemies and the level design - that it's a pity the game ends up being a little bland. Let's focus on the good points, shall we, because ultimately Blood Will Tell is a game that will give you a great deal of joy, so long as you can get over the terrible camera, repetition in the early levels and some of the more frustrating jumping puzzles.

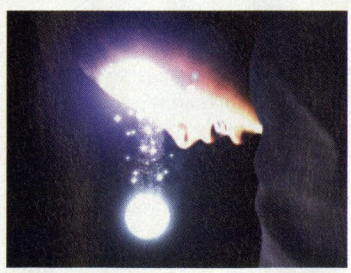
[up] Surgery in feudal times

BOSS BATTLES GALORE

Blood Will Tell follows the story of a rather unique hero, Hyakkimaru, a samurai who is not entirely human. Actually you could say that at the beginning of the game he's not really human at all, instead consisting of a number of mechanical parts and weapons, as he had 48 of his organs stolen by demons (known as fiends in the game) when he was just a baby. Essentially the story revolves around Hyakkimaru and his gender ambiguous sidekick Dororo (we think it's a girl but others disagree) hunting down the fiends responsible and getting said organs back.

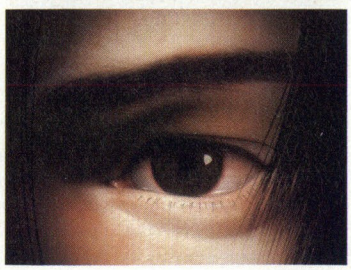
Where Hyakkimaru's organs once resided are a bunch of rather nifty replacements, including two fairly weak but very fast swords instead of arms, a cannon in one knee and a machine gun in the other as well as some less overt weapons/abilities. Every time Hyakkimaru defeats one of the 48 fiends who stole one of his organs he gain skills or attributes associated with it. The first body part reclaimed is his left eye, which, for the first time in the game allows him (and by extension us) to see the world in colour. Other body parts give different skills - his stomach adds health, his nose allows him to detect fiends, your left leg allows you to dash and his arms add to attack power.

Combat is the mainstay of Blood Will Tell and there is certainly a lot of enemies to hack your way through. For the first few levels combat is a bit of a chore, mostly consisting of repetitively mashing the two attack buttons, but later combat really opens up with a number of swords to find and combos. Combos are executed by first doing a charge move into an enemy at which point the player is presented



[above] I think you may have leprosy

[below] It's like he's staring into my soul



!!! Fingers crossed more of Tezuka's work gets made into competant games.

And you thought I was just tying my shoelace. Fool!

That's one way to try and get that stuck basket off his head

The original Mr Potatohead... not quite as cute

with a number of random button presses - the length of the combo is determined only by the length of time you can hit the right buttons in order allowing for some very hefty damage to be inflicted. Longer combos also reward players with health pickups, random powerups and the like. If boss battles are your thing then Blood Will Tell will certainly keep you happy - there are 48 bosses with nefarious claim over body parts as well as a smattering of others, making for around 60 in all. Each of the bosses is markedly different, ranging from so incredibly huge you have to run around the map to attack different appendages through to ones the size of Dororo the diminutive scrappy androgynous kid sidekick. Most of the bosses fall into rather repetitive patterns making them relatively easy to kill with the right strategy but the sheer number of them keeps the boss battles fresh and interesting.

[above] Shivving in feudal times

If boss battles are your thing then this will certainly keep you happy

FIENDISH

Dororo adds another interesting little touch to Blood Will Tell. Players have a limited control over the little scamp and can order him/her/it it to help fight (by throwing rocks or punching and kicking), pick up items, look for hidden content (very helpful in tracking down fiends you may have missed) and to come to you if Dororo gets stuck or lost somewhere. It's also possible to have a second player take the role of Dororo in co-op but not without significant problems. The camera is entirely Hyakkimaru-centric making for a rather difficult time doing or seeing anything as the secondary player. Intermittent levels feature Dororo as the playable character, and although Dororo is a thief character, the levels aren't stealth based but revolve more around solving simple puzzles and a smattering of combat. Although nowhere near as good as the bulk of the Hyakkimaru levels these intermittent quests are brief and mostly offer a nice change in pace.

There's no real technical achievement in the presentation of Blood Will Tell but nevertheless it is quite an attractive game. Hyakkimaru looks fantastic, as do the 48 fiends. Special attacks and combos look great but the engine has one serious downfall, the same one that plagues what seems to be the majority of third-person titles - poor camera. The player has partial control of the camera for a good portion of the game but this does not make up for the instances in which control of the camera is relegated to the PS2 at which time players can expect to be attacked by off-screen enemies, fall into pits that you can't see and all manner of other frustrations. That said, the camera control for boss battles is quite excellent as it allows the player to centre the camera on the boss making the faster moving ones much easier to track and dodge. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Wow Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Brilliant story, lotsa bosses, sexy combos.

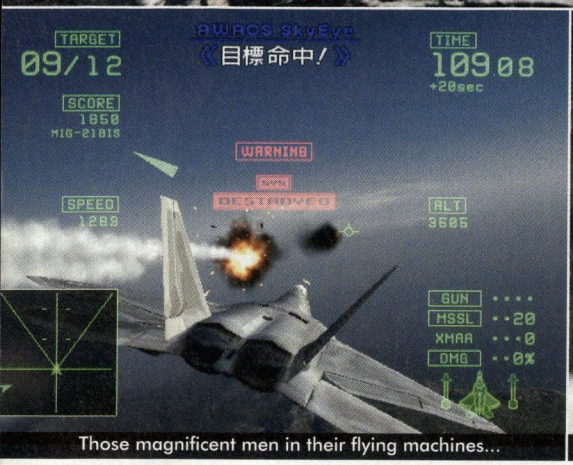
MINUS: Repetitive, camera, repetitive.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	79	78

OVERALL
77

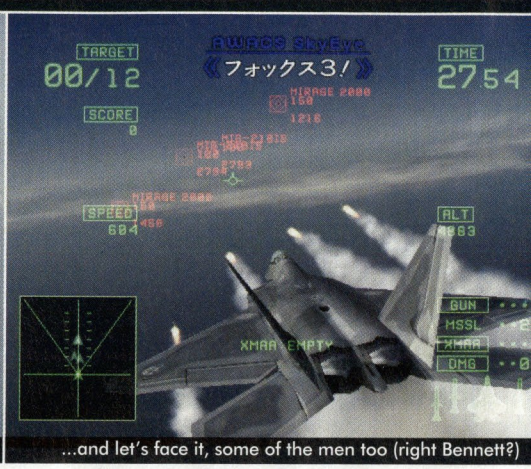
Not the best sword swinging game but great storyline.

!!! Not only do you get to swat down enemy planes like flies, there's plenty of ground pounding on offer too.



Those magnificent men in their flying machines...

...they entrance all the ladies...



...and let's face it, some of the men too (right Bennett?)

ACE COMBAT: Squadron Leader

BENNETT RING will be your captain for this flight

While plenty of gamers fancy the idea of strapping themselves into the high-tech cockpit of a $40 million jet fighter, not so many are turned on by having to plough through a 700-page manual to learn how all of its widgets work. But within minutes of reclining in the virtual Martin Baker ejection seat in this game, they'll be feeling the need for speed and picking off bogies faster than you can say "That's right! I am dangerous!"

PICK OFF BOGIES

Hardcore simmers will look at this title with disdain. None of the intricate and anal systems they've spent years learning apply to this title. Even the flight model is an overly simplistic representation of how a real aircraft cuts through the skies. And it doesn't matter at all, because those guys have their Falcon 4s and LOMACs to keep them busy. But for wannabe flyers who actually have a life, Ace Combat 5 offers a nice taste of air-to-air action without requiring the attention span of a Buddhist Monk.

Set in a fictional world sometime in the near future, this fantasy land handily includes the full range of real world aircraft from the early 60s right up until the fighters of tomorrow. Showing just how different to a normal flight sim this game is, there's even a strong narrative driving all of the action. The missions are all pre-scripted and fairly linear, but every now and then a small choice will be presented to spice things up if you're playing the mission for a second time. Would you rather have your escorts protect your tailpipe from a hot rocket injection, or do you think you're tough enough to take on the bad guys on your own? Basic commands for your wingmen are a new inclusion to the game, and can make all the difference when you're deep over enemy airspace.

Flying these jets is as easy as picking up your control pad and hitting the X button. You don't need to worry about bleeding off too much airspeed for fear of stalling, and dodging enemy missiles is as simple as flinging your jet around the sky like a pre-schooler pumped up on pure red cordial. This gives the player plenty of time to focus on the core task of this game - blowing the crap out of everything that moves. With around 50 missiles strapped to your jet, you'll be well equipped to take down the dozens of relatively mindless targets that fill the skies. For the most part it's a very enjoyable blast-fest, but does occasionally stray into the deep blue sky of repetitiveness.

One of the game's major strengths are the gorgeous visuals. The aircraft models are so sexy that PC simming forums are chock full of complaints about why their chosen PC sim doesn't look as good as this PS2 title. The landscape isn't quite as detailed, but it still does a bloody good job. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade flight sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

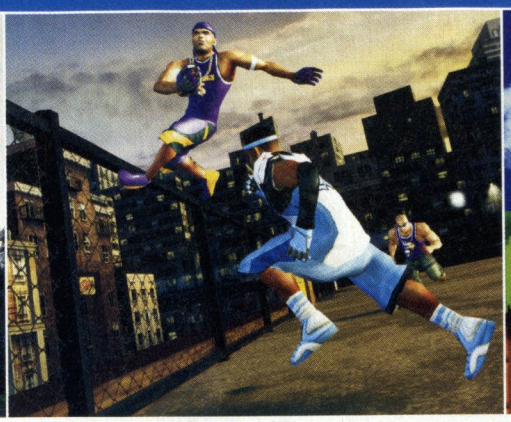
PLUS: Looks great, easy to get into, action-aplenty.

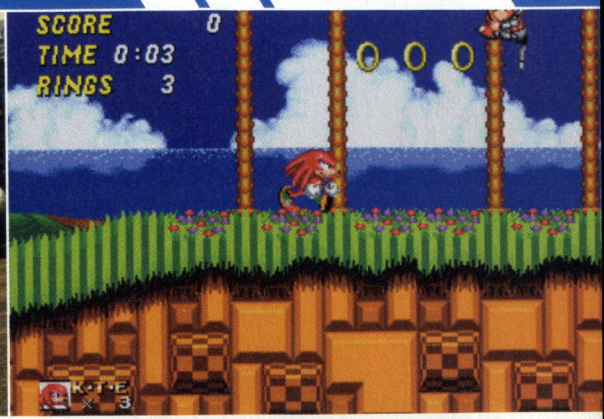
MINUS: Can get a little repetitive, too shallow for hardcore simmers.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	80	85

OVERALL
88

An enjoyable diversion into the world of aerial combat.





KINGDOM UNDER FIRE:
The Crusaders

It may seem like a bit of an odd choice to turn a not particularly well respected or loved RTS into a hack and slash action game but surprisingly the end result is an enjoyable, if somewhat derivative affair. For the most part Crusaders plays like Dynasty Warriors with players charging through battlefields hacking enemies left and right, laying the beatdown on bosses with special moves and combos and trying to get bigger and better weapons for your character.

Unlike Dynasty Warriors, Crusaders puts the emphasis on tactics and strategic troop movements rather than on simply mashing the attack buttons until everything is dead, by giving the player the ability to command a number of different units in real time during the lead up to battles. Instead of simply charging into a battle players can whittle down enemy numbers with archers, defend against cavalry with spearmen, breach walls with artillery, perform flanking maneuvers, ambush and what have you. Between missions the player can level up units and characters RPG style as well as buy new equipment and abilities.

Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders looks decent with some nice character models and animations combined with a long draw distance, but the voice acting is so atrociously bad you can't help but laugh.

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / **XBOX** / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Phantagram / **PUBLISHER:** HES /
PRICE: $89.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
88	76	81	80

[PE] As Flava Flav would say "Mace to your face"

NFL STREET 2

If you can get past the tragically hip, hip-hop styling of the whole thing, NFL Street 2 offers a new and pretty damned exciting way to play American football. It works on two levels. The first is that it strips the hulking behemoth of a game down to bare essentials. Fewer players on the field, no penalties, no punting; all the elements which slow things down have been carefully removed. Instead you've got a game that's been distilled down to the thrills: where big plays and constant turnovers are the rule rather than the exception.

The other level on which NFL Street 2 pleases is the excellent singleplayer mode. Starting as a lone quarterback you take part in one-off challenges and street games until you have yourself an experienced team and can start taking on other street teams. The good mix of straight games and challenge-based events are augmented with RPG-style stat-building for your main man, and in true EA style, there's a high level of customisation on offer too. Not only can you choose the overall size and shape of your alter-ego, you can dress him right down to the type of goatee, sunglasses, hat (each with several positions), and of course, the thickness of the gold chain and type of medallion to be worn. Dollar sign, anybody?

New to this sequel is narration by none other than X-Pimp-My-Ride-Zibit, the second level Gamebreaker mode (which when activated will guarantee a score or turnover), the ability to jump off walls and a whole bunch of new game modes - which all adds up to a comprehensive game that's surprisingly strategic. Still no online though...

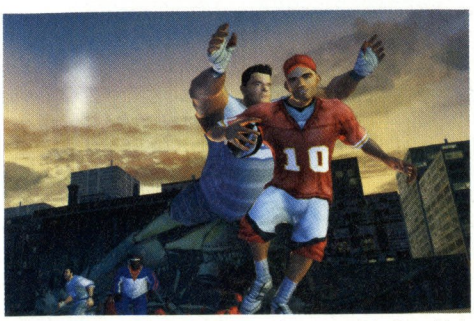
March Stepnik

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fantasy Sport / **PLAYERS:** 1-4
DEVELOPER: EA / **PUBLISHER:** EA
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
78	79	85	80



[above] Ubisoft is in red, EA is in white. Run little Frenchie!

SONIC MEGA COLLECTION PLUS

Sonic Mega Collection Plus is a more complete greatest hits compilation than the recent Sonic Mega Collection release for the GameCube, featuring 20 Sonic (and Sonic-related) titles. It still doesn't have any of Sonic's 3D outings but it does feature all of the key Master System and Mega Drive titles, all of his GameGear releases, a number of spin-offs (Dr Robotnik-themed puzzlers, anyone?) and a couple of non-Sonic extras for good measure. The most glaring omission is Sonic CD (for the Mega CD) so you'll have to wait for Sonic Mega Collection Plus Extra for that one.

In regards to extra content Collection Plus does feature an art gallery and even scans of the original manuals for each game, but the navigation system could have been much more intuitive.

So is this the definitive Sonic back-catalogue? Not quite. The games themselves are still a gas in a nostalgic kind of way, but this collection feels a little lite. A couple of slick video clips featuring interviews with development staff would have been nice. Even the supposedly obligatory history of Sonic (mentioning his one time status as more recognised than Mickey Mouse by the world's kids, of course) with techno soundtrack and closing frame of the blue hedgehog speeding off into the sunset would have given this 'best of' oodles more personality. But its inclusion still wouldn't be enough to wash out the nasty taste in our mouths that the dear citizens of the USA pay only US$20 for the same thing. Even with a generous exchange rate, that's around 30 Aus bucks - half of what we here have to pay for a local, PAL release.

March Stepnik

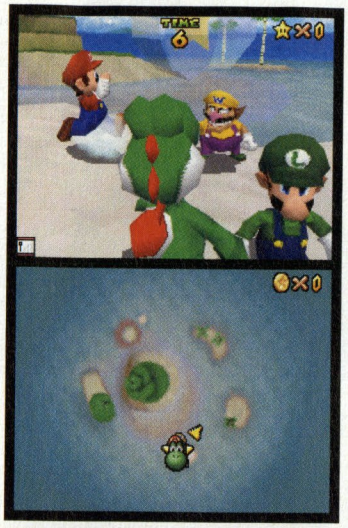
AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

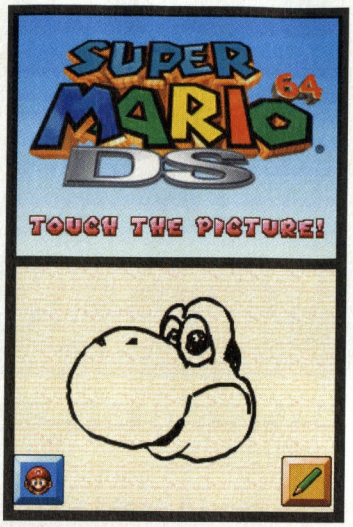
CATEGORY: Various / **PLAYERS:** 1-2
DEVELOPER: SEGA / **PUBLISHER:** THQ
PRICE: $59.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	72	82	70

[above] Ah yes, the infamous "Sonic's Snotballs"



[above] Swing your partner to and fro



[For Moe] Yoshi was... irrepressible!

SUPER MARIO 64 DS

Every new system needs a killer-app and while Super Mario 64 DS doesn't exactly fit the bill, it certainly comes close, and almost does for the Nintendo DS what Super Mario 64 did for the N64.

It all starts at the main menu screen - just like the N64 version did - with the game inviting you to get acquainted with the new control system by manipulating Mario's face (and in this game, Yoshi's too) with the stylus. It does this by reducing the detailed mug to primary lines, and allowing you to push and pull those lines (thanks to an impressive algorithm) as you please with wacky results. Once you've tired of playing with Nintendo's mascots, the real magic kicks in: you can draw and play with your own pictures and shapes at will. It may be a simple tech demo but it has an unnatural, zen-like ability to pull you in. The way your own creative input is combined with the speed, precision and open-ended benefits of the stylus is something we hope Nintendo bring us a hell of a lot more of in the future.

SUPER MARIO 64 V2.0

The game proper is a bit of a mixed bag. It's Nintendo at its best and its worst, reusing an old title on a new system but including a helluva lot of twists and additions in the process. Indeed, Super Mario 64 DS boasts 150 stars to collect (as opposed to 120 in the original) and the ability to control four characters (Yoshi, Luigi and Wario join Mario in this adventure) throughout. The new characters have been integrated into the game quite well - each has unique abilities and powerups which are required for certain stars. In keeping with the theme of measured unlocking of new areas and abilities, your comrades must be rescued first.

As for the dual screens, the action takes place on the top screen, while the bottom, touch screen is used as a map and for analogue control of the game. This is where Mario 64 suffers the most; control via the touch pad requires a leap in skill and patience (although some swear by it) while the d-pad and buttons approach just doesn't offer the same precision as the original.

The real magic of Super Mario 64 DS, though, is the mini games. Usually a casual aside, these touch screen-based events steal the show. With a small handful available at the start (the rest of the 36 available are unlocked by playing the main game), the entire collection highlight the capabilities of the DS better than the main game does. Two immediate favourites are the simple Where's Wally style hide and seek game and the awesome Bob-omb Squad - a game where the stylus is used to pull back and aim a slingshot at falling bombs on the screen. Fast and addictive, waving a little stylus has never been so much fun.

Super Mario 64 DS isn't the killer-app the DS needs, but it serves as an excellent crystal ball into the future of the DS and its dual, touch screen shenanigans. And the future is bright indeed. For those who haven't played Super Mario 64 before, add 5 to the score.

March Stepnik

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platform/Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $TBA
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

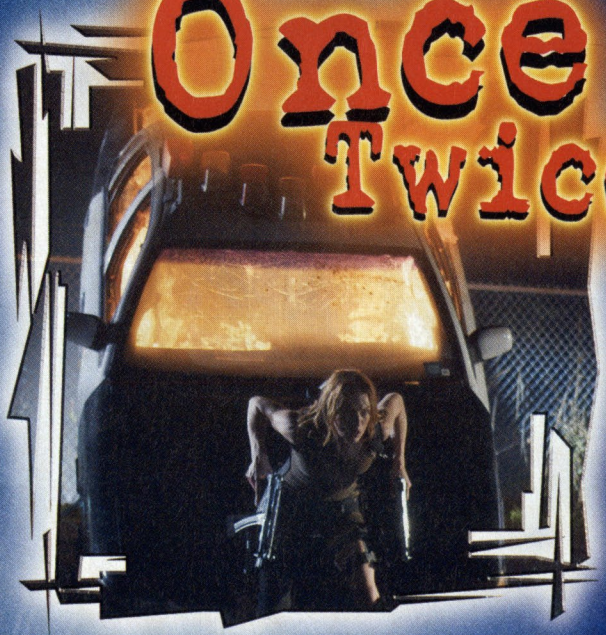
GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	86	88

OVERALL
85

"A ROLLER COASTER RIDE OF EXCITEMENT"

- Stefan Halley, Hero Realm

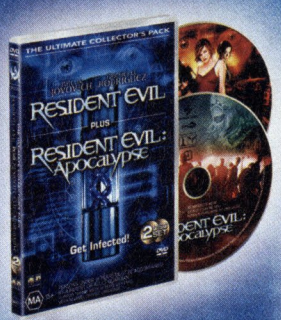
Once Bitten, Twice The Action!

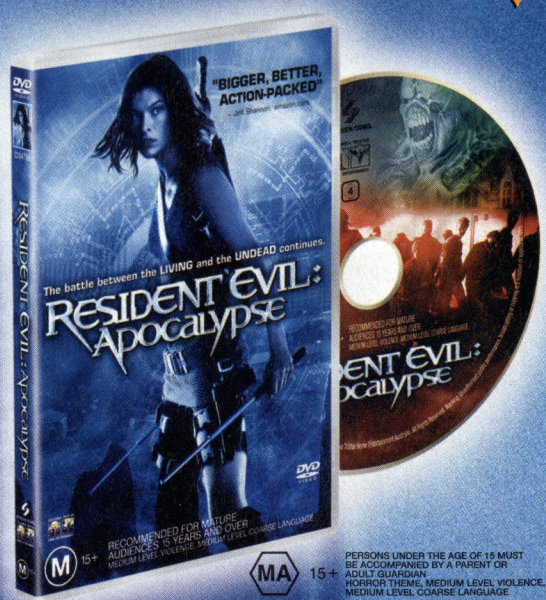


Non-stop action is the name of the game as the battle between the living and the undead continues, in RESIDENT EVIL: APOCALYPSE on DVD. It's fully loaded with excitement, special effects and all the big screen thrills you're looking for.

RESIDENT EVIL: APOCALYPSE

New bonus features and never-before-seen footage





RESIDENT EVIL THE ULTIMATE COLLECTOR'S PACK

Both Resident Evil and Resident Evil: Apocalypse on 2 DVD discs

SCREEN GEMS. Constantin Film DAVIS IMPACT SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

RENT OR BUY ON DVD MARCH 16

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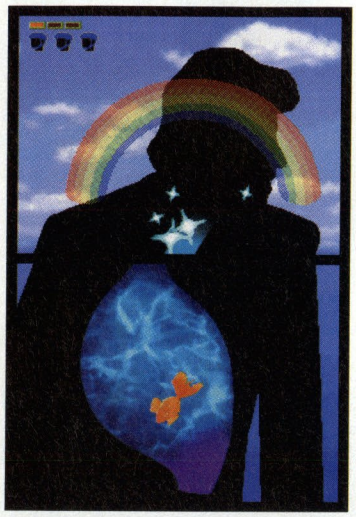
PROJECT RUB

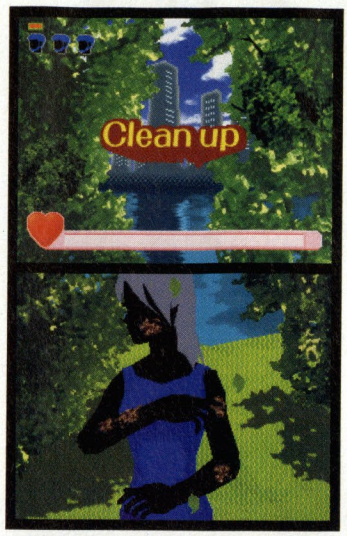
Essentially a collection of mini games, Project Rub utilises almost every trick the DS has up its figurative sleeve. Employing both the DS's touch-screen and microphone exclusively to control the action, Project Rub sees you completing innumerable bizarre tasks in an effort to win the love of a good woman.

Before each of these mini-games an attractive sounding female voice beckons you enthusiastically to "Rub It!" Now we know what you're thinking, pulling out your unit in public and rubbing it vigorously is something one rarely, if ever does. Once you do start rubbing it however you'll be surprise at just how much fun it can be, and playing the game isn't too bad either. Whether you're using the stylus on the touch screen to sling-shot bombs from a speeding car, to poke raging bulls to death, or to massage goldfish from a stranger's gullet Project Rub never ceases to entertain and surprise. Even more novel still however is its use of the DS's built-in microphone, which requires that you blow or yell into the DS in order to blow a boat through the water, or attract the attention of an in-game character among other tasks. It's a feature that is bound to attract many a bemused look if you happen to be playing on public transport. Probably best not to take on the blow jobs in public eh?



The crux of the argument against Project Rub is that it is a fairly repetitive affair, and offers only superfluous enticements to replay the game. Despite this it's undoubtedly the DS launch title that most exploits the handheld's unique abilities.

Maurice Branscombe



[above] The post-scat sequence

[above] Is that Sara Marie up the top?

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

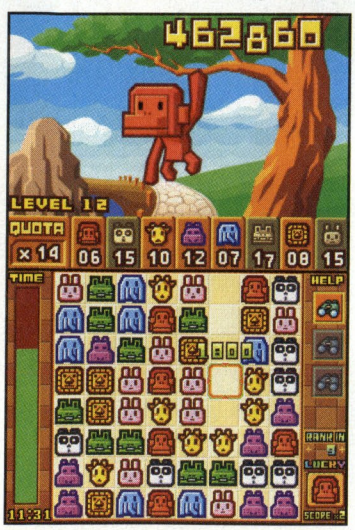
CATEGORY: Touch-Screen Weirdness
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	64	78

OVERALL
79

ZOO KEEPER

Zoo Keeper is Bejeweled with animals instead of jewels. It's also the best game of Bejeweled you will find, with the added bonus of being able to take it around with you wherever you go. Apparently there is a plot to Zoo Keeper but after playing it for numerous hours all I could find of it was the fact that if I didn't capture enough animals my lunch would consist of three slices of pickles - or then again that may be the reward when I'm good.



[above] Hey, it's a PCPP reader!

At any rate, gameplay in Zoo Keeper revolves around lining up three or more animals of the same type to capture them. Players have to work against the timer in five different game modes to reach certain thresholds, achieve the highest point score, clear a set number of animals and the like. Two players can also go head to head with a simple yet addictive head to head mode that only requires one of the players to have the game cartridge. Zoo Keeper utilises the touchscreen for control and the method works brilliantly allowing players to simply tap or drag and drop the animals they wish to move. The presentation of Zoo Keeper is simple but excellent with cute blocky animals, bright colours and nonsensical end game screens. There is no technical prowess shown in the graphics but they perfectly compliment the gameplay. Unfortunately the same can't be said about the sound which consists of annoying and highly repetitive bubblegum midi and beeps of ascending pitch when you rack up combos of captured animals.

Joey "animal lover" Tekken

[above] Cue crappy Elton John song

[up] If only this were Happy Tree Friends

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

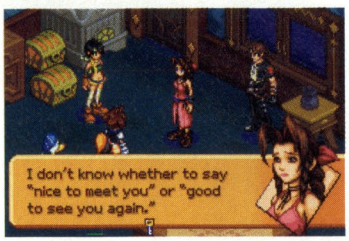
CATEGORY: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Buddiez.inc
PUBLISHER: Ignition
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	65	82

OVERALL
80

KINGDOM HEARTS: Chain of Memories

Let's all be friends and hug - then we can have a tea party and ramble about how much we love each other. If that first sentence put you off, then there's no chance in hell the story in Kingdom Hearts will ever appeal to you. This handheld spin-off is once again a love-fest of Square and Disney characters, rolled-up like Sushi into a strange little action/RPG that doesn't really deliver any decent action or role-playing.



[up] How about you just flash your jugs?

Whilst the production values are high - the artwork is all rather nice, and there are some quite lovely pseudo-3D cutscenes - there is very little depth to this game other than a convoluted battle system involving playing cards.

Sora, Goofy and Donald make their way into Castle Oblivion, which isn't really a castle at all - or is it? It's doubtful you'll really care, as the story is so pointless and weak that you'll just trudge through looking for some decent gameplay to get your teeth into.

With combat, you shuffle cards around using the shoulder buttons, and the card you 'use' becomes the attack that Sora performs. Each card has a numerical value which determines its strength in battle. Naturally, Sora can learn special attacks that require 'storing' multiple cards at once, which can then be unleashed to do extra damage.

The problem with this system is that the battles still take place in real time, and you move Sora about the screen as you would in an old scrolling beat 'em up. So you're moving, dodging attacks, and trying to desperately shuffle your cards and put together an attack - which then has to hit the enemy correctly on a 2D plane, otherwise your attack hits thin air. Actually, you do none of this, as it's far easier to just button mash the attack button and hope for the best, queuing up combo attacks blindly in the hope that they'll 'beat' the enemies' cards and win you some experience points. A very dull affair that at least looks pretty.

Eliot Fish

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / DS / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action/RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Square Enix/Jupiter
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	75	60

OVERALL
62

SPIDER-MAN 2 DS

The trouble with the DS is that it's always going to challenge developers to successfully implement the touch screen. Forget the Wi-Fi, voice-recognition pap for now; it's all about getting your grubby mitts on screen number two in fun and interesting ways. Unfortunately, Spider-Man 2 DS is the perfect example of a developer not only having trouble utilising the dual screens but also of struggling with the basics of good game design.

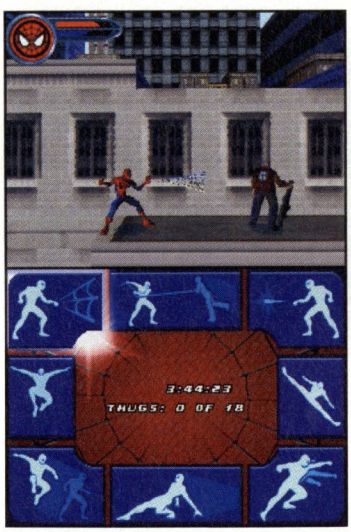
Spider-Man 2 is... well, it's not good. The limitation of web-slinging in a 2D environment isn't the showstopper it most potentially could have been (especially when compared with Spidey's wonderfully freeform console cousins); it's the god-awful level design and poorly-implemented combat engine that spoil this otherwise reasonably paced and presented Spidey adventure.

Spidey's hopeless when it comes to the biff. His melee range is difficult to judge resulting in all-too-frequent situations where you're pinned down (often fatally) by enemy attacks. Special moves add to the experience, but the basics of engaging an enemy feels woefully under-developed. Given that combat is a big part of Spider-Man 2's gameplay set, it's just a bit too awkward to be any fun.

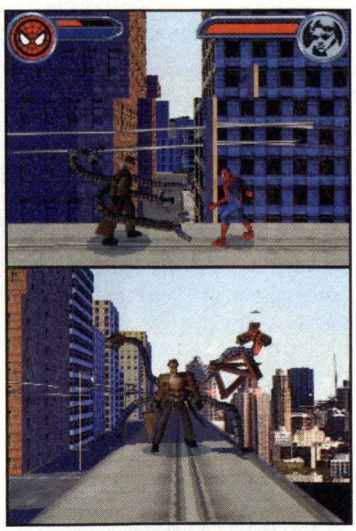
But the real gripe is with the levels themselves. They're mostly bland affairs with little in the way of distinguishing features. Most of game's mission objectives boil down to rescuing hostages from various points around the map, and given the speed with which you can sling around the place and the limited view, it's all too easy to miss your objectives and then spend ages trying to find them. Add a mission timer to this and watch your frustration grow.

And the touch screen? Oh, for most of the game it's a touch-based special move selector, while during some boss fights it's used to complete small mini-games for success. Yawn. A map would've made this game far more user-friendly, but you don't need a second screen for that...

March Stepnik



[above] Does whatever a touchscreen can



[above] The Guardian Angels go mecha

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Platform
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Vicarious Visions
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	60	49

OVERALL
58

Eyebrow piercing done the old fashioned way

Once Upon a Time in China

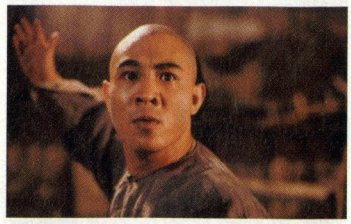
HONG KONG LEGENDS
(UNIVERSAL), M 15+

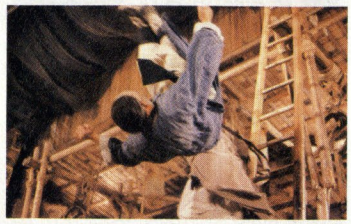
The film that launched the new wave of period piece kung fu films, *Once Upon a Time in China* is as impressive today as it was when it was released in 1991. Starring Jet Li as one of China's most popular historical figures (and the subject of many films and novels) Wong Fei-hung, *Once Upon a Time in China* is set in Canton in the late 19th century, at a time when China is dealing with imperial influences and unsure whether to embrace the new cultures or repel them. Caught in between the foreign nations, local government and an extortion gang, Wong and his militia group must fight to find a balance.

There's no doubting Jet Li's prodigious mastery of kung fu (after all, he was National Wu Shu Champion five times, the first of which was at the age of 11), and *Once Upon a Time* is a fantastic showcase for his skills, with the ladder fight against Iron Robe Yim (Yee Kwan-yan) in particular taking kung fu to new heights of invention. A bonafide classic.

This single disc release also comes with some reasonable extras. There's a full length audio commentary by experts in the genre Mark King and Bey Logan, a couple of trailers, a rather low resolution interview with Jet Li that includes some great *Shaolin Temple* footage and an interview with Yee Kwan-yan. There's also an interesting biography of Jet, covering all the major stages of his career (damn shame about the narrator though - you could cut that cheese with a knife).

Cam Shea





[top] Not yet in his "look how cute I am" Fong Sai Yuk 2 stage - thank god

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 5

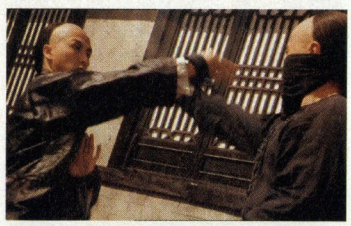
Oooh my ring! I shouldn't have had that vindaloo

Iron Monkey (2 DISC)

HONG KONG LEGENDS
(UNIVERSAL), M 15+

Iron Monkey is something of a spin-off of *Once Upon a Time in China*, and tells the story of a young Wong Fei-hung (played, curiously enough, by a girl - Tsang Sze-man) and his father Wong Kei-ying (Donnie Yen) who find themselves embroiled in the battle between corrupt town officials and the local Robin Hood figure Iron Monkey (Yu Rong-kwong). As you'd expect, it's not long before Iron Monkey and Wong Kei-ying band together to fight a greater evil... but not before a couple of classic battles between the two.

This film has a great number of things going for it. As you'd expect with Yuen Woo-ping directing (who went on to choreograph the fight scenes in *The Matrix* trilogy, *Crouching Tiger* and *Kill Bill*), the fight scenes are superb - if a little overly sped up. The cast is also a strong point, with familiar faces (Donnie Yen and Yee Kwan-yan) and young talent (such as Tsang Sze-man) in equal measure. And who could resist Taiwanese actress Jean Wang, who plays Miss Orchid, Dr Yang/Iron Monkey's love interest? She's just stunning.



[above] Iron Monkey and Hot Chick - they fight crime

The second disc has a reasonable selection of extras. There are interviews with Tsui Hark, Yu Rong-kwong, Li Fai (The Witch) and Tsang Sze-man, trailers, notes and biographies, a retrospective on the film with Donnie Yen, a couple of featurettes on action and choreography and even footage of both Li Fai and Tsang Sze-man at the 2003 Wu Shu Championships.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 6

Police Story

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

HONG KONG LEGENDS (UNIVERSAL), M 15+

Jackie gets mad at the wardrobe department, and I don't blame him

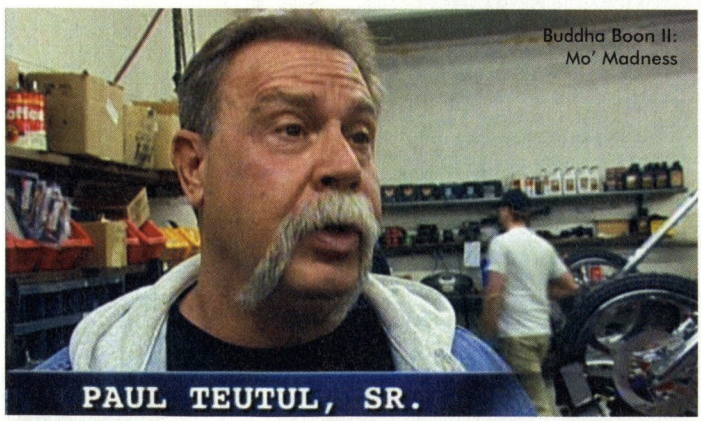
Even if you already own a copy of *Police Story* you need to do yourself a favour and pick up a copy of the Hong Kong Legends Special Collector's Edition as this is the best version you will ever see - unless you have access to the now out of print Japanese laserdisc. If you're unfamiliar with the *Police Story* series then you should be ashamed of yourself for missing two of the all time great action films (the third one was rather lacklustre for the most part).

The plot is simple - Chan plays an honest cop imaginatively named Jackie who captures some drug dealers. They get away and vow revenge until Jackie captures them again. There is of course a little more going on than that but the plot only serves as an excuse for the action and there is plenty of that. The stunts are, for want of a better word, incredible and showcased exactly what we could expect from Jackie Chan for the rest of his career. We get an incredible downhill car chase, bone crunching fight scenes and so much broken glass in the finale that one critic dubbed the film "Glass Story".

What makes this edition so good is that it contains an outtakes reel never seen outside the Japanese laserdisc edition, a brilliant and entertaining commentary with Bey Logan, an expert on HK cinema and an interview with Jackie.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 8



Buddha Boon II: Mo' Madness

American Chopper Toolbox 1 (3 DISC SET)

MAGNA PACIFIC, M 15+

I don't like bikes and I'm not particularly fond of reality TV but for some reason I love *American Chopper*. The reason for this love is simple - Paul Jr. and Paul Sr. the father and son team who run Orange County Choppers, the custom motorcycle workshop that forms the lynchpin of the series. The father and son are almost polar opposites - Paul Jr. is a quiet, overly sensitive but seemingly uncaring artist responsible for designing and fabricating the custom bikes shown in the series and Paul Sr. is a giant gruff but generally sweet natured bear of a man who hides his insecurities behind a blanket of good natured (though harsh) abuse and genuinely loves his son who he seems to be having a go at 16 hours a day.

Then of course there are the bikes, or rather, the works of art in motorcycle form. The vehicles OCC produce are astounding in their detail (especially the Black Widow Bike on the second DVD) and you can't help but be fascinated by the work that goes into fabricating them, painting them, constructing them, testing them and finally showing them. A straight documentary about the creation of these bikes would have been fascinating but the fly-on-the-wall human drama only adds extra spice to a fantastic bit of TV.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: N/A

Thanks for disposing of the corpse little man

Satan's Little Helper

IMAGINE ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

Bad name, not a bad movie. *Satan's Little Helper* has an interesting pedigree. Writer/Director Jeff Lieberman was one of the more interesting low budget horror auteurs in the 70s crafting such interesting fare as *Squirm* in which electricity causes worms to lust for flesh (it's not as bad as it sounds), *Blue Sunshine*, a backlash against hippies that sees 60s acid droppers having severe side effects 10 years later and becoming homicidal bald maniacs and *Just Before Dawn*, one of the creepier slasher films of the period and the obvious inspiration for last year's *Wrong Turn*. Then he took 25 years off from making horror movies.

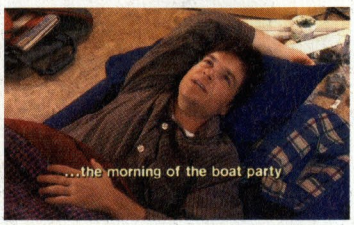
His latest stab at horror is undoubtedly his most successful and clever, utilising suspense and tension instead of gore or shock effects to tell the story of a young boy who becomes the naïve sidekick of a costumed killer when he mistakenly believes him to be dressed as the hero of his favourite game, Satan's Little Helper. There are a number of very tense moments dotted throughout the film but Lieberman also uses some good natured humour to move the action. Stalk and slash films live or die on the strength of their villains and the "Satan Man", as he is called in the credits is an absolute winner. Although he never speaks (like Michael Myers or Jason Voorhees) he exudes personality through some great physical acting and comedy.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: Unknown

Arrested Development Season 1
(3-DISC SET)

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M15+



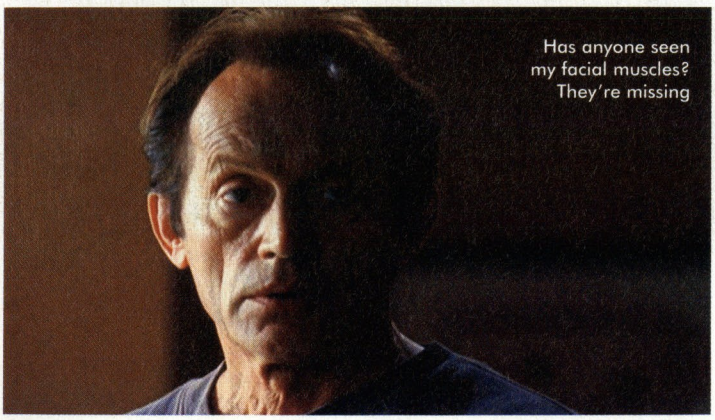
[above] Yet another "sailing out to international waters ends badly" story

More than any other sitcom in rotation at the moment, *Arrested Development* is a mine of comedy gold. The 22 episodes of the first season follow the antics of the hapless Bluth family, a formerly affluent but not so nuclear family unit who find themselves having to actually work for a living to support their lifestyles when the head of the family (wonderfully played by veteran character actor Jeffrey Tambor) is sent to gaol for some dubious accounting practises and has his assets frozen. Jason Bateman (of *Teen Wolf Too* shame) plays Michael, the dutiful middle son and seemingly the only person in the family that realises that to pull through they have to remove their heads from their collective arses and face facts. The opening monologue from the pilot perfectly sums up the cynical, bitingly funny world view of the film with Ron Howard (the narrator and executive producer) introducing the family, their plight and finally a smiling Michael and saying, "So why is Michael so happy? Because he's decided to never speak to these people again".

Although a tad light on extras, *Arrested Development* Season 1 features one laid back and quite entertaining audio commentary per disc, a bunch of deleted scenes, many of which are incredibly funny, outtakes and a few making of fluff pieces that are mildly interesting but immanently skippable.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6



Millenium Season 1 (6-DISC BOX SET)

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, MA 15+

Lance Henriksen has been blessed with one of the most beautifully careworn faces to ever grace an actor. He uses his craggy visage and craggier voice to great effect in *Millennium*, the dark and rather morbid crime series created by Chris Carter of *X-Files* fame. Henriksen plays Frank Black, a retired FBI profiler with the somewhat disturbing ability to see into the minds of killers to such a degree that he can almost witness their acts, knows their motives and can predict with unerring accuracy their next crimes. Although he is officially retired, Frank works as a consultant for the enigmatic Millennium Group, a cadre of like minded individuals who see the end of the world as being nigh and do everything in their power to stop it.

The first series of *Millennium* is a little rocky in parts but introduces viewers into the dismal world the characters inhabit - there really seem to be no truly good people, only victims, predators and survivors. There is also a strong suggestion that there is an even darker undercurrent to the world and that demons walk amongst us, a theme that plays a far stronger role in seasons two and three.

Millennium Season 1 contains some excellent special features including a commentary on the pilot by creator Chris Carter, a 50 minute making of and an interview with the Academy Group, the real life inspiration for the Millennium Group.

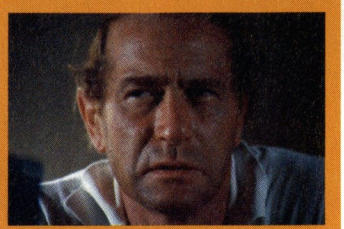
Daniel Wilks

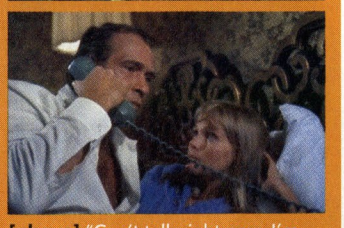
MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8

THE *Greatest* MOVIES YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

The Night Stalker
The Night Strangler

MRA, M 15+





[above] "Can't talk right now, I'm erm, interrogating a witness"

Ok, so it's not just one film, it's two telemovies and an ensuing TV series but the Kolchak mysteries deserve to be seen by a wide audience. Undoubtedly one of the inspirations for the *X-Files*, *Men in Black* and countless others, the Kolchak movies and series, produced in the early to mid 70s featured Darren McGavin as Carl Kolchak, a tenacious reporter who gets embroiled in mysteries far greater than him.

In his first outing, *The Night Stalker*, Kolchak is on the trail of a story about a sadistic serial killer operating in and around Las Vegas. Upon being stonewalled by the police, Kolchak realises that there is something far larger and more gruesome going on behind the façade of the neon city. McGavin is wonderful as the oh-so dry and witty Kolchak, a vintage newspaperman more reminiscent of those found in noir films than his 70s contemporaries. The character proved so popular in the first film that a second was rushed into production soon after and a short lived but well loved television show appeared soon after. With any luck the movie box set that is now available in Australia will sell well enough to inspire MRA to bring out the TV series.

Although the boxed set comes with no special features and only an average transfer it also contains an excellent 24 page booklet about the making and history of the films and TV series.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 4

Win Win Win

Win The Punisher on PS2 or Xbox plus a T-shirt!

>> Frank Castle's one of the most uncompromising men in comic book history, so it comes as no real surprise that The Punisher on PS2 and Xbox is also quite a brutal entry in the gaming canon. Whether it's interrogating perps with a cremation oven, or literally "executing" unique kills, you'd better keep younger siblings away when this game is on.

Thanks to Super Happy THQ we not only have six copies of The Punisher to give away (on either Xbox or PS2 - whatever's your poison), but we also have six ultra cool Punisher T-shirts for each lucky winner. Gimme gimme gimme! To be in the running for the game and shirt, just tell us:

Who is the creator of The Punisher comics?

Put your answer, your system of choice, and your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: **Punish Me, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

Win Phantom Brave on PS2!

>> Thank the gaming gods for Nippon Ichi. Sure, their games may look like they'd run comfortably on a SNES but that's just because they've packed so much gameplay in that there's simply no room for graphics dammit! And that's why we're here right? It's all about the gameplay, and Phantom Brave has it in spades, swathes and cavalcades. Erm, yeah. The whole point is - if you have even a passing interest in turn-based strategy games, or desperately want to take a carrot and make it the most lethal weapon on Earth, you need Phantom Brave. Thanks to our friend-o-trons at THQ Australia, we have six copies on PS2 to give away.

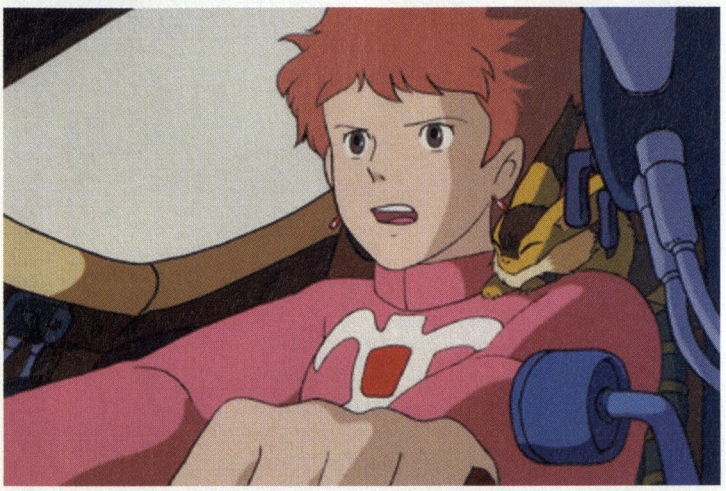
To be in the running, just answer the following:

What is the name of the main Chroma in Phantom Brave?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address, on the back of an envelope and send it to: **Carrot Power, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

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 February 28 and entries close at 6pm April 6. 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 April 7 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 will be notified by mail and results published in the June issue of Hyper on sale May 4. 9) 6 winners will each receive The Punisher on Xbox or PS2 (RRP $99.95) and a Punisher T-shirt (valued at $20). 6 winners will each receive Phantom Brave on PS2 (RRP $99.95).Total value of competitions is $1319.40. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

Apparently wearing an upside down bat on your mouth is the height of fashion



Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds

GENRE: ADVENTURE
PRODUCTION: TOPCRAFT

The films of Hayao Miyazaki have recently gained a great deal of acclaim in the West with the successes of *Princess Mononoke* and particularly *Spirited Away*, building on well-received video releases of earlier works like *Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*. But the film that really kick-started his career, 1984's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds*, has been almost impossible to see outside Japan until now.

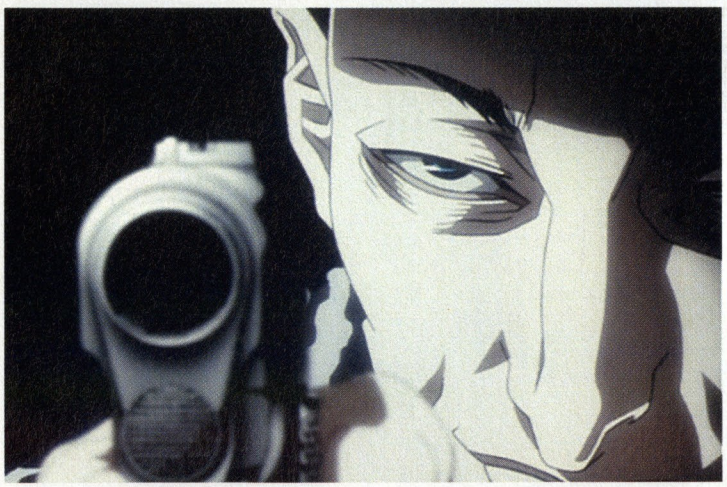
Based on the manga Miyazaki drew between animation jobs, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds* is set on a future world devastated by war. Humans live in settlements protected from an ever-expanding poison forest, full of deadly gases and aggressive giant insects. Nausicaä is the princess of a small, peaceful feudal state that becomes a battleground when a Pejiteian aircraft carrying an ancient weapon, the God Warrior, is shot down in their valley by Tolmekian forces intent on using the monster weapon to burn away the toxic forest. Nausicaä attempts to save her people from a war they have no part in, but is lead to a revelation in the forest. Can she convince the warring parties to stop before they wipe everyone out?

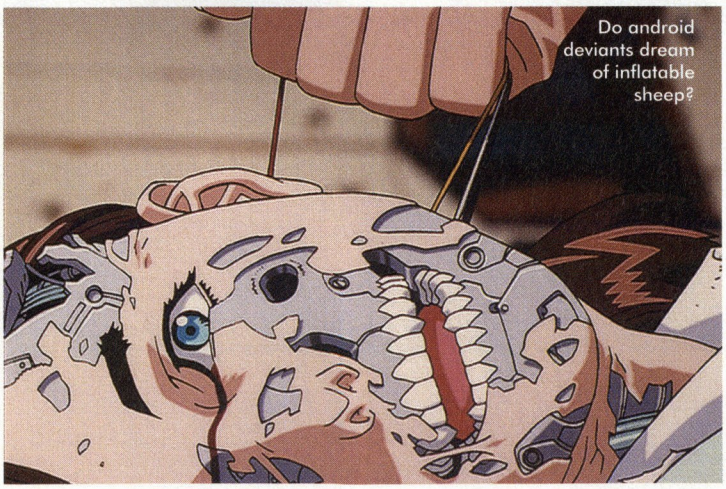
Twenty-one years after its original Japanese release, *Nausicaä* is still a fantastic film. It has an epic story, complex characters, beautiful art, and a balance of amazing action sequences and thoughtful smaller scenes. But perhaps *Nausicaä's* main point of interest is the way it has influenced all of Miyazaki's subsequent films. The strong heroines, the flying machines, the environmental themes and a whole host of smaller details that make up the Miyazaki 'style' all have their roots in *Nausicaä*. It is a film that puts all his other work into perspective and should be an essential purchase for any fan of Miyazaki's films.

Our advance review copy didn't contain the English dub, but it features the voices of Alison Lohman, Patrick Stewart and Uma Thurman.

Malcolm Campbell

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 9
OVERALL: 10




Do android deviants dream of inflatable sheep?

Parasite Dolls

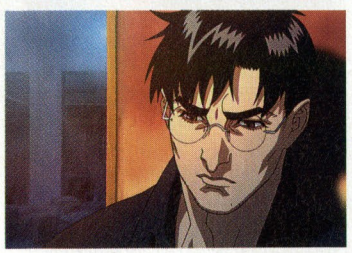
STUDIO: AIC
GENRE: CYBERPUNK

Parasite Dolls marks a welcome return to the world of *Bubblegum Crisis*, a place in which humans and androids (Boomers) live side by side but with a relationship marred by mistrust and violence. Taking place in the six years after the *Bubblegum Crisis* series and thirteen years after *AD Police* (also set in the same world), *Parasite Dolls*, a three episode OVA tells the story of a super-secretive branch of the AD Police, known as The Branch who deal with Boomer related crime.

The three stories really run the gamut of what we have seen before - drugs that effect Boomers, Boomers falling in love with humans, dead prostitutes and the like but *Parasite Dolls* still manages to be a compelling OVA due to excellent storytelling and an equally good dub. The first two episodes dealing with unrequited Boomer love and a killer destroying prostitute Boomers are definitely the weakest of the three but their failings are made up for in the brilliant third episode about an Anti-Boomer group.

The animation looks decidedly old-school, much like the original *Bubblegum Crisis* or *AD Police* series but as such doesn't overshadow the storytelling on screen. If you're looking for an action packed series to watch you may be a bit disappointed - *Parasite Dolls* is quite slow moving at times and takes a while to build to a climax but if you give it time the crescendo is worth it.

Daniel Wilks



[above] Working for Hubba Bubba is a tough gig, but someone's got to do it

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 8

Peacemaker
VOLUME 1: INNOCENCE LOST

CATEGORY: ACTION
PRODUCTION: GONZO

Set in Kyoto during the age of the samurai, *Peacemaker* focuses on 15 year old Tetsunosuke Ichimura. Two years earlier, his parents were killed by the Choshu clan, and he's now driven by a burning desire for revenge. Thus, Tetsunosuke (and his older brother) joins the Shinsengumi in order to become a powerful swordsman and get back at those who slew his parents. Although the story centres on Tetsunosuke, *Peacemaker* has a really large ensemble cast, and much of this first volume is spent introducing them, with the side effect that things move pretty slowly.

Much of the episodes take place in and around the Shinsengumi compound, with Tetsunosuke making a brat of himself and generally making the viewer wonder whether this is really someone they should care about. The other major cast member that deserves a mention is Soji Okita, a mincing effeminate First Unit Captain in the Shinsengumi. On the surface he's a little like a feudal Japan Michael Jackson, with a high girly voice and a self confessed love of "playing tag and things". He's also a brutal and uncompromising swordsman, and it's this duality that *Peacemaker* looks set to really explore - when you take up the sword do you let a demon in?

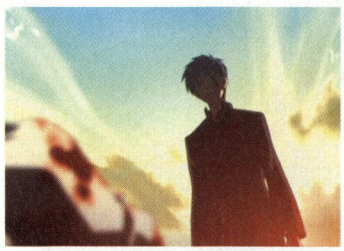
Despite its slow pace and often annoying lead character, *Peacemaker* is going to be a series worth watching. The animation is superb and the setting has plenty of potential. It's probably best to watch this one in Japanese with subtitles though - the bad southern American accents really feel out of place in the dub.

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 6
OVERALL: 7

Lunar Legend Tsukihime
VOLUME 1: LIFE THREADS

CATEGORY: VAMPIRE MELODRAMA
PRODUCTION: GENEON / J.C. STAFF



[above] Yep, it was made in Japan alright. Damn sickos

Ever since being involved in a terrible car crash when he was younger, Shiki Tohno has had the ability to see death, or rather, the lines that link matter to life. By severing those lines he can also sever life. This "Mystic Eyes of Death Perception" is something he's been trying to deny since he was a young boy: he wears special glasses to block out the lines, attends high school and tries to be a normal teenager.

Of course, all that's about to change. There's his move back to live with his sister in his parents' mansion, a place that she locks down like a fortress before nightfall. There's his sneaking suspicion that something's not quite right with his "friend" Ciel. And then there's his vision of brutally killing a woman in the park, and the revelations that follow. We won't give anything away, but Shiki soon becomes reluctantly aware that it's his destiny to use his power.

Presented in anamorphic 16:9, those of you with widescreen TVs or projectors will greatly appreciate the presentation of *Tsukihime*, but whether the content will be enough to draw you in is another matter. Not that this series is shaping up to be bad, it's just very slow moving with dialogue that doesn't feel at all natural. There are two more volumes on the way in this twelve part series, let's hope it picks up.

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 5
OVERALL: 6

EXPANSION

THE RISE AND

MEGA

It may be hard to imagine today, but for a brief period in the early 90s Sega was the most successful console manufacturer in the world. Between 1991 and 1993 the Sega Megadrive system was the dominant force in videogame systems outselling Nintendo and garnering acclaim from all sections of the industry. This success however was to prove short lived as a series of failed add ons would see the once all conquering system struggling to survive by 1994. With this in mind Hyper takes a look back at the Megadrive, its various add ons and the reasons for its eventual demise.

BY MIKOLAJ NAPIERALSKI

SUPER HAPPY JAPAN HQ

Work began on the Megadrive at Sega's Japan HQ in the mid/late 80s. With the Master System dead in the water and Nintendo controlling 90% of the console market Sega was anxious to get a head start on the competition in the next generation. The company's main source of revenue at this point was its arcade

MADNESS

FALL OF THE DRIVE

division - think Outrun, Afterburner and Shinobi. Sega therefore decided to base the new home system's internal architecture on a then popular arcade board known as 'System 16'.The idea being that it would allow for quick and easy home conversions of arcade hits.

The Megadrive was launched in Japan in 1988 and, as planned. the new system was marketed on the strength of its arcade conversions with games such as Eswat, Space Harrier 2, Super Thunder Blade and Dynamite Duke amongst the first to be released. While these games showed the potential of 16bit technology the new system was still only a moderate success in its native Japan and continued to be outsold by both the aging NES and PC Engine throughout its lifespan.

The U.S. launch would prove far more successful. Renamed the Genesis (due to legal reasons), Sega's system was launched in 1990. While initial sales were solid, it was E.A., and its line of sports games that would play a vital role in selling the system in its early days. Titles such as John Madden Football and EA Hockey almost single handedly sold the system to the sports mad U.S. public. However it was the introduction of Sonic The Hedgehog in 1991 that finally tipped the videogame market in Sega's favour. Arguably the first game to really show the power of the Megadrive, Sonic was an instant phenomenon and saw sales of the Megadrive/ Genesis eclipse that of the NES for the first time. Sega's short reign at the top had begun.

Nintendo meanwhile was still committed to its huge NES user base and would delay release of its follow up system, the Super Nintendo (SNES) until 1990 (Japan) and 1991 (USA). Although this delay gave Sega a valuable head start in the 16bit console wars and some breathing room, it also ensured that the SNES would be technically superior to the older Megadrive. Sega's solution was the introduction of the Mega CD system.

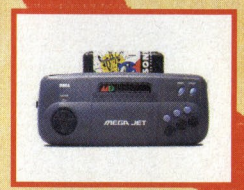
NIGHT TRAP (SHUDDER)

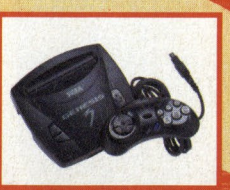
Connecting to the underside of the Megadrive, the Mega CD was designed to increase the original Megadrive's processing power and rival the SNES's growing dominance. Released in Japan in 1992 (U.S. in 1993), it initially sold very well. However this was still CD gaming in its infancy and the system was soon bogged down in dire 'interactive games' as developers struggled to find a use for this extra memory. Titles such as Time Gal and Road Avenger were little more than flashy cartoons while all the scantly clad girls in Night Trap couldn't hide the fact that there was barely a game behind the flashy graphics. Aside from the above titles, many releases were simply cheap rehashes of existing games with video introductions and better sound. The public was not impressed. That same year Sega also released the Megadrive II and Mega CD II. Sleeker then the originals, these were streamlined systems designed to reduce manufacturing costs (the Mega CD II is a top loading system).

Despite these innovations Sega had begun to rapidly lose market share to Nintendo by the end of 1993. While the Mega CD wasn't exactly a flop, it hadn't proven as popular as hoped and, most crucially, it had failed to stem the SNES's growing popularity. The software was slow in being released and by the end of 1993 there were still only a handful of games worth owning. The SNES on the other hand was fast reaching its pinnacle and its line of RPGs, such as Secret of Mana, were proving extremely popular in the U.S. and Japanese market.

> Arguably the first game to really show the power of the Megadrive, Sonic was an instant phenomenon

With the next generation of consoles not yet ready for release and market share dwindling, Sega decided to try and boast interest in its aging system with yet another add-on, the ill conceived 32X (1994). Intended to fill the gap between the





[right, top to bottom]
The Wondermega, the AIWA Stereo/ Megadrive, the Nomad, the MegaJet and the Megadrive 3

By the time you had connected a Mega CD, Megadrive and 32X you were looking at around $AUS 1000

16bit generation and the yet to be released Sega Saturn, the 32X did little but confuse the public. Technically a '32bit' system the 32X plugged into the top of the Megadrive and utilised some of its processing power as a way of cutting down costs. Unfortunately the system had virtually no support in terms of games and turned the once sleek Megadrive into a three level tower of mangled technology. By the time you had connected a Mega CD, Megadrive and 32X you were looking at around $AUS 1000 in costs. Add to this the fact that the release of Sega's Saturn and Sony's PlayStation was imminent and you had an add-on that was redundant before it even hit store shelves. The 32X would end up in bargain bins within a year and the fact that there were only 27 games released for it in total only added insult to injury for loyal Sega customers.

By 1995 Sega's market share was in freefall. Its Japanese president, Hayao Nakayama announced that all support for the Megadrive and its add-on systems would be discontinued in favour of the Sega Saturn. This effectively handed the 16bit market over to Nintendo, which would continue to make money on the aging platform even as Sony introduced the PlayStation and Sega floundered with the release of the Saturn. And so by 1995 Sega's brief reign at the top was over. While the Megadrive had sold over 27 million units internationally and proved especially popular in European PAL markets, Sega's ill fated attempts at adding various expansion systems to the original Megadrive had failed to win over the public. More significantly for the company, its very public failures had ensured customers lost faith in the brand and this would prove disastrous in the next generation as the Sega's Saturn went head to head with the all conquering PlayStation.

[left] The Super Magic Drive - not exactly legal
[above] 90s ads, including the obligatory sexy French one

THE ADD-ONS

POWER BASE CONVERTER (1990)
■ The first add-on launched for the Megadrive, the Power Base Converter was basically a Master System you plugged into the top of the system. Intended to allow backward compatibility, the initial version allowed for both Master System cartridges and the relatively obscure Sega Cards to be played. While a nice idea and one that Sony would use very effectively with the PS2, the Power Base Converter was ultimately a bit pointless. Master Systems were available to buy at bargain prices in Japan and the U.S. by the time the Megadrive was released and the older platform had never been particularly popular in these regions anyway.

MEGA CD (1992/93)
■ Not the white elephant that some people make it out to be, the Mega CD was initially very popular. However a lack of decent games and a high price ensured the System never received the kind of widespread support Sega had hoped for. Games such as Sonic CD, Silpheed and Final Fight CD are considered classics but the system couldn't stem the growing popularity of the SNES.

32X (1993)
■ Like the Mega CD the 32X sold well initially but it was dead within a year of its release due to lack of support. Sega hadn't learnt its lesson with the Mega CD and repeated the same mistakes all over again. In total there were only 27 games released and only a handful of those took advantage of both the Mega CD and 32X running in tandem.

SEGA TERRA DRIVE (EARLY 90S)
■ Also known as the Mega PC in Europe, this was a bastard combination of Megadrive and underpowered Amstrad PC. You could plug Megadrive cartridges in to the front and later version were also compatible with the Mega CD.

MEGAJET (EARLY 90S)
■ A portable Megadrive available for use on flights in Japan, it featured 6 buttons and a cartridge slot in the top. Only compatible with the LCD screens used in planes at the time it's little more than useless curiosity these days.

MAGIC DRIVE (1992)
■ An illegal piracy device developed in Taiwan, the Magic Drive allowed you to make 'back ups' of Megadrive games to standard 3 1/4" discs. Using what looked like a Power Base Converter and an external disc drive, these were available for a brief period from shady import stores in the early 90s. Sega however soon sued everyone involved and the system disappeared as quickly as it had appeared - in the West anyway. The systems came in a variety of models with different memory capacity but they all basically did the same thing. Mine came complete with hilarious 'engrish' instructions.

WONDERMEGA (1993)
■ Basically a Megadrive/Mega CD hybrid with a karaoke machine built into it. It proved quite popular in Japan before the days of Sing Star.

MULTIMEGA (1994)
■ A 'portable' Megadrive/Mega CD hybrid, this also doubled as a CD player and looked very slick. However you still had to connect it to a television to play games so unless you were particularly fond of taking your Megadrive with you wherever you went (why?) it was a bit pointless and expensive at US$399.

AIWA CSD-GM1 (1994)
■ More weirdness. This was a CD player that doubled as a Megadrive and could also play Mega CD games. Who thinks of this stuff?

NOMAD (1995)
■ A proper handheld Megadrive, the Nomad was only released in the U.S. and featured a 3-inch colour, backlit LCD screen. It also featured 6 buttons and was compatible with all regular game carts. Released in 1995 it would gain a cult following and is quite hard (not to mention expensive) to get a hold of these days.

SEGA GENESIS 3 (1998)
■ Released in the U.S. in 1998 by Majesco Sales, this was a scaled down Megadrive/Genesis aimed at the budget market. Not compatible with the Mega CD it would nonetheless go on to sell 2 million units in the U.S. and 10 million game cartridges.

MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:
78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:
freakscene@next.com.au

TEH GEEKZOR

The issue (if you could call it that) of gamers being represented as geeks or nerds has been around for a long time. The letter Biased? In issue #137 inspired me to write in about it. What does it matter if gamers are represented as geeks or nerds? It wouldn't change anything if we weren't. People who aren't gamers, aren't gamers because they don't enjoy or don't understand video games, not because there worried about their image. What does the opinion of you guy's matter anyway? Anyone whose reading is already a gamer and some hints by you aren't going to make them change. Last thing; how on earth could you give Spiderman 2 10/10??? The corny dialogue and directing renders the good plot meaningless so I spent most of the movie wishing I was watching something else but that's just the opinion me and a few others!!!

Vegie

P.S. Did you hold some of those letters back or was everyone just pissed off with you last month?

Hey Vegie,
You have a good point about people who don't play games. It is a bit unfortunate that the mainstream press as well as other groups view all gamers as nerds and geeks but if the individual isn't hurt by it what does it matter. Also, as far as we're concerned, the term Geek has been reclaimed by the group it was originally aimed at much like nigger or fag. Geek, as we see it is something of a badge of pride - it means we are on the cutting edge of technology, information, entertainment and pop-culture. We'll have more on the status of gaming as being geeky versus cool in an upcoming Game Theory. As far as Spider-Man 2 is concerned, you're entitled to your opinion (no matter how wrong you are you big foolish wrong person you), but we think it's probably the greatest superhero film of all time. Finally no, we didn't hold any of the letters back for the issue - we just got a lot of cranky mail all at once.

[above] Darryl Leech is no mere mortal man, he's an art god!

LIVE LONG IN A CRISPER

I just wanted to respond to some of the most negative feedback I think I've ever read in Hyper.

I am a long time Hyper reader - and 36 to boot - have many more likes than dislikes.

A wise man once said:

"The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one..." – Captain Spock, Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn

I am one of the many (and like SHIT and NADS in varying degrees - depending on the game!).

Regards,

DoohanOK

Hey DoohanOK,
I'm glad that you were commenting on the need of the many instead of the gamers being geeks thing because the quoting of Spock could have put a serious hurt on our cause :)

LOVES THE BLAU

Hey Hyper people, i just thought i would drop you a quick line, just because i felt pretty bloody compelled to do so after i read some critical letters in Ish# 137.

Okay, first thing, this Owen guy that went on about "injections of geek humour" or someshit (im not really putting much effort into this hey?) Seriously, thats a load of shit, if he is talking about blau sightings and Amos related humour then he can go suck a rats left testie, coz thats one of the really cool things that i find separates you guys from the rest, the fact that you dont take everything seriously, thats why i buy you magazine!!! COZ ITS FUNNY!!! If he cant handle it then its not a product for him and should get over it and move on or just accept it and realise ya aint gonna get anything better for $6.95!!!

OH yeah and that other guy misjerk, or misterk or something he was a tossa too. okay its like 2.07am and i need to go to bed, so yeah, im not writing this to get published or anything, dont publish this coz i sound like a drunken, illeterate tosser who swears too much, but yeah i seriously had to say something about this as it got me really fired up and i wanna sleep peaceful like.

Yeah this misterk said something about occasionally doing 3D work and buying it to see whats going on in the industry!?!?!?!?

Okay, lets face it, i dont know anything about this kinda shit, i just play the games, but if Mr stuck up graphics designer jerk has a problem with your magazine becuase its not serious enough or someshit then arent their publications out there that might be more suited to him?? i dunno?

Do you remember NMS?? Now that had some stupid shit in it, show these people that mail section (skulls graveyard) and then they can see someone who doesnt answer any questions seriously. And an all round shit magazine.

OKay im rambling random shit here hey, ummmm anything else.....

oh yeah, i buy your magazine, i have bought your magazine on and off for for like 8years or so i guess it would be now, maybe less i cant remember, but yeah, i personally

CAPTION THIS!

PART 63 WINNER

Ron Knox platonically tickled our funny bones the most this month

"The lesser known fifth teletubbie – Kinky Winky"

feel that it is pure gold, its a great price (what else can you get for under $7 these days) its informative, its funny. Its got everything, and i love the in humour.

i could basically go on and on, infact...

So yeah, im gonna sleep now coz the pot plant keeps starring at me.

Im not that much of a freak, and i am more intelligent then this email sounds, i just thought i would let you know, coz im strange like that.

-Dave

Must be strange getting some crazy guys late night ramblings in your inbox at work the first thing in the morning.....

Maybe the fact that i AM fan, should make you reconsider a few things? I mean what sorta people are you trying to attract here? Nah its all good im normal....

who actually reads these? do one of the writers do it? Or like some PA kinda person that seperates the shit (like this) from the actual publishable material??

Hey Dude,
You should realise that saying "don't publish this" is like a red rag to a bull for journalists. We'll take your tiredness into account and not make fun of your spelling and grammar (or more precisely the lack thereof). Just get some sleep and call us in the morning.

AMOS 2008

Firstly, I'd like to say that Hyper keeps getting better and better with age, like a fine wine or cheese. As you guys said, its like a club, only without poker machines and pictures of the queen, but who needs her, we have Amos(god bless 'im!!!) Now that my kissing ass section is over with, i'll get on to the real message: Whats with you freaks who dis Hyper? Turning to the mail section in 137, I was suprised and saddened by what I saw. Heres a message for you bitter twisted folk: Wake up and come to your senses or get lost and buy any of the lame imitations that have infested the games magazine rack at your local newsagent and leave us good, decent Hyper loving people alone!!! I apologize for the rant, and realize you guys can put these fools in their place, but I can't stand seeing crap like this infest these hallowed pages. Anyway, must dash, its time for a little game of Mario 64 (replaying to get into the groove for the release of the DS and 64-4)Keep up the good work guys!!!

Kingpin

P.S:Amos for president!!!!

Kingpin,
We appreciate the sentiment of Hyper solidarity champ but I need you to do something for me. Repeat after me - one exclamation point is enough to finish a sentence. Now, as far as Amos is concerned, we'll happily support our little Korean love god for the race for president - as long as you take care of that whole monarchy issue first.

HYPER SOLIDARITY

Hi-didely-ho Hyper gamerino's,

I've been buying (and reading) Hyper for a long time now .

I find your fine mag to be as high a quality now as it was ever was, but having read the letters in the current issue (137), in particular the one's writen by people calling themselves Owen and Misterk, I feel a need to add my two cents.

As far as the whole bias thing goes, nothing that I have read could be further from the truth. While everyone of us may have our favourite consoles I would think that in no way excludes any of your writers from stating the obvious. And that is - IS IT WORTH YOUR HARD (or not so hard) EARNED MONEY? Just because there may be two more PS2 reviews this month, or one less Xbox preview does not constitute bias. As far as I know none of you are paid by Sony or Microsoft or nintendo. And if you are I daresay that the big 3 would be firing off some angry e-mails. Keep calling a bad game a steaming pile of horse droppings. Don't become the Alan Jones of the game's industry. And as for Hyper containing political messages about George Bush, I can only say -HUH ?!?!. WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN ?

I must have missed that huge campaign you guy's waged against George dubya in the recent election over there. Bad luck, your dastardly plan for a President who isn't missing a chromosome was foiled by one genius in Australia who latched onto your fiendish plot.

But really, some people take an attempt at humour the wrong way (although I don't really know what other way you could take it). Just keep this in mind. Dont get angry, there's nothing you can do about stupid people. What's the use of being educated if you're stupid?

Anyway, I felt compelled to support you guy's against this unwarranted attack on your person(s). Don't let them get you down,

Dave.

Thanks for the support Dave - we've never had such a barrage of emails from readers leaping to our defense before. Big ups to everyone else who wrote in - you know who you are!

RATIONAL CRITICISM

Before getting down to the meat of my letter, I read those couple of complaints in last issue's mail bag and couldn't help but wince at the cutting remarks and open hostility being thrown back and forth between you and the irate readers.

Look, I know they were harsh and you had every right to defend yourselves, but please do try to take one message on board: there are those of us who've been reading Hyper since long before the "BLAU" phenomenon, before "Amos"(who?) was apparently so popular and before (I mean NO offense, honestly) Cam Shea was editor.

Some of us don't cope well with change. Some have come to love your great mag for certain traits that, unfortuneately, aren't as prominently featured as they were or have been replaced by ones that we are unfamiliar with. And, as we all must do at times, maybe you guys should just take a deep breath, consider all perspectives and say "Alright, we aren't perfect and we can go a little far with things. Let's make a note of toning it down slightly in the future."

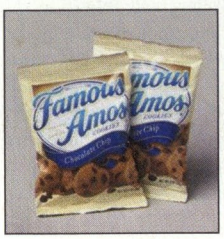
I have a couple of questions for you:

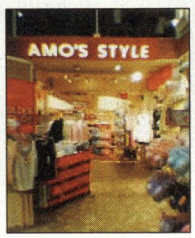
1. After the relative soundness of Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone, are there any plans to adapt some of R.A Salvatore's fantasy literature (ie the Dark Elf series) to video games? I ask because, what with the success of

ATTENTION WOULD-BE WRITERS

We get a lot of letters every month asking us how they can do some freelance work for Hyper. The answer to this is simple - write something for us, make sure it is interesting and send it to Daniel or Cam. Don't, whatever you do write us a review of a game that's been out for a couple of months - it's a sure way to lose our interest fast and shows a lack of effort on your part. If you're serious write us a feature on something cool, go out and get an interview with someone interesting, write us a flashback on a great old game, write an in depth review of a crazy Japanese game or peripheral. Surprise us, make us laugh, impress us and you may get in the mag and even got some filthy lucre as part of the deal.

DEPT. OF MISC. IN-JOKE SIGHTINGS





[above left] CJ wants to get some Famous Amos in his mouth. Don't we all?
[above middle] Henry spotted Amo's Style - a Japanese Lingerie shop
[above right] Ben Niedorfer noticed Amos on a WoW message board

[above] Wack Jacko mannerism - we wonder if he'll pull that move out in court?

Lord of the Rings and other fantasy-based games of late, there would be no better time to strike while the iron's hot.

2. You mentioned in your preview of Wipeout Pure that downloadable content will be available after a little while. Would you say that this is to be the norm for PSP games? Will we finally see some non-PC games bring out expansion sets?

3. Could we see a feature article on how to make a career in the video games/games journalism industry in the near future?

Thank you very much for your time guys.

Leon S

Thanks for the reasonable criticism Leon - if only more people were willing to take a rational view when giving us feedback instead of simply going on the attack then changes may happen. Now on to your questions:

1) *It seems fairly reasonable that there will be quite a lot of fantasy games in the upcoming year with the success of LotR and the hype about the upcoming Chronicles of Narnia. Whether or not Salvatore will be used as a basis for these games is debatable. Whilst his popularity is huge we'd prefer not to see his books translated to games as, ultimately we don't think he's that good. Now a bit of George R. R. Martin or China Mieville would go down a treat.*

2) *With any luck the predominance of wireless networking or online capabilities with consoles nowadays will see a boom in downloadable content for all platforms. We have no firm information as yet but some upcoming games (such as Pariah, previewed this month) will allow you to create your own maps for upload and download and extra content for KotOR 2 should be downloadable by the time you're reading this.*

3) *Once again this one is kind of debatable. The industry in Aus is very small and an article about it could just be a bunch of people saying how lucky they are to have a job. We'll see.*

THE BULLSHIT SICKNESS!

yo hyper,

ive got this idea 4 the gta series: gta underground. ive bin working on it for a year now and i was just wonderin if u had connections to rockstar or somethin

ps:its fully sik

pps:wilks suks

blake gillett

Blake...umm...how to put this politely... no, we don't have Rockstar contacts and there's no way in hell we'd put anyone in contact with a games development company if they ask us in a quasi-ebonic, barely literate series of spelling mistakes. If you're serious, contact us again using English and we'll see what we can do.

A BIG CUP OF GROW-THE-#$%@-UP

Having been a casual gamer for years I feel it's my duty to bring this up. First I'd like to point out that this is just my opinion. All I intend to do is point out a few things that could be changed to make the mag a better reading experience. If you don't like it too bad - like I said its just my opinion (in fact what the hell else would it be? And by replying with stupid insults you in fact just prove your resolve is as strong as a baby deer, that you think someone else's opinion being expressed is a threat, like it could endanger your own opinions and ways of thinking. It doesn't. Don't be so weak.)

At first Hyper attracted me because of its simplistic styling, witty comments, and genuine reviews. However, taking a look at the last year or so of issues, it's struck me that Hyper is changed.

Change is necessary, change can be good, but not in this direction. Hyper now seems to target an altogether different audience than it used to. It now seems to cater towards the decidedly geeky and unfortunately stereotypical video gamer. With constant referrals to 'owning', 'crates', 'blau', 'crushing', etc. In-house jokes are fine, for a while, and in moderation, but to pepper every issue with this rubbish? Give me a break for Christ's sake. Think of the casual guy who picks up your magazine and reads the stupid ed replies to fan mail - try being funny or maybe helpful instead of boosting your pathetic egos by writing something dumb and supposedly cool - cool to your fellow workers, that is, like a scathing reply to some 14 year olds letter. 'Cutting someone down to size', or blowing them off is easy when you're printing what you want, and they can't reply. Don't be such pussies. Try showing off to the people who float your magazine. Have a shave. Take a vacation to Europe, get a normal haircut, go to Oktoberfest, and sleep with a few nice women. This isn't meant to be the thing to do, or the be all and end all of male human existence, but is does come highly recommended. You know, the more normal things in life. Maybe then you'll realise how stupid it sounds when you say something like 'I'll crush you'. And the constant mention of beer, pizza, gives me the shits. Its like the staff are continually trying to convince their audience that they are, in fact, cool, normal blokes that surely drink beer and do manly things. I don't particularly care if they do or not, but I'm sick of hearing about it. I never see self-confessed nerds hanging out at the local pub drowning their scraggly bum-fluff beards in a big pint of ale.

I still enjoy parts of the magazine, but not enough to be bothered renewing my subscription. A tip for you guys - reviewing PAL releases is great and all, but not when you can buy or rent the game from your guys even get around to reviewing it. I think Hyper needs a big cup of grow-the-#$%@-up. Prove that Hyper is the unbiased, open-minded form of media that you claim, and print this letter.

Disappointed Reader

This is what we love in a letter, someone that accuses us of being too sensitive and saying we shouldn't take offense to criticism and then goes on to say that we are, "weak", "pussies", "stupid", and then telling us to go and have "a big cup of grow-the-#$%@-up". Way to put a dent in your

LETTER OF THE MONTH

GOOD GENERAL FEEL

I just read the letter in the previous issue about being biased towards PS2, and going off your magazine. I buy many magazines, and not once have I found you guys to favour a particular system. The reason I buy hyper is because it gives a good general feel on all systems and entertainment.

Also, most games appear on Xbox and PS2 equally, so honestly, how biased can it be? The fact also remains that developers make more individual games for the PS2, so as an Xbox and PC owner, I accept the fact that occasionally I will see more games that are PS2 exclusive than Xbox and PC exclusive, because, ah, thats the way the developers make it? Again, its only occasionally.

The part about Halo2 and San Andreas was also out of place. Three of the biggest games of the year are released within 3 weeks of each other, and as almost every single other magazine I purchased showed, the big three created a bumper issue! As a reader, you get let down when you flick through the reviews only to find mediocre games, but are you serious? That issue was the best 7 bucks Ive ever spent. Apart from the big names, were many great games which made the quality on show the best of the year, and your complaining? Sorry Hyper, put shit in there to fill in the gaps to flick past.

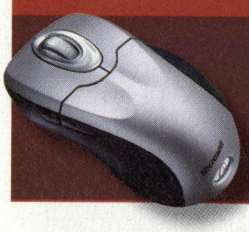
Personality. Interesting point, lets read the manual anyone? I dont know about you, but game manuals are never opened, as they are so damn boring. So who the heck will read a review if its written in such a formal format. The review is the opinion of the gamer (or gamers) who give the game a thorough go through, nit picking and praising due to their own unique tastes. Thats why most reviewers are usually experienced in that particular genre, giving a fair going over due to there knowledge, but also adding their opinion as a gamer, just like you. The feeling and experience of the game provides a much better guide as essentially that is what you, the gamer, will judge it upon.

Im not trying to brown nose, but I do buy around 5 gaming magazines a month, search the internet to keep updated on the gaming scene, and find the Hyper magazine one of, if not the, best and most informative issues out there. Ive been a reader of this mag since school (Im now 28), and yes, I finished year 12 when I was 18 lol, and it seems to only get better with age!

Matthew Smith

Hi Matthew,

In case any of the cranky readers are looking at this, the reason we give this letter Letter of the Month is not for brownnosing but for the excellent point about game manuals. They ARE boring for the most part and the only ones that frequently get read are the interesting and colourfully written ones such as those that came with the Ultima series, Warioware GBA, Space Quest, Bureaucracy, the GTA series as well as others we can't name off the top of our heads.



You've won a Microsoft® IntelliMouse® Explorer for PC!

Best. Mouse. Ever. The IntelliMouse® Explorer is an ergonomic optical mouse with five re-programmable buttons and an excellent feel for serious gaming!

argument there champ. There's also that matter of the central section of your letter where you tell us to go to Oktoberfest, drink some beer and schtup a few nice looking women. What the hell does this have to do with the magazine? Are you intimating that we have no lives and should be envious of you and your German beer-drinking and wench boning ways or that that is what you would like to hear about in the magazine? Or is it that you think that none of us have any experience of "real" life? It would be easy to rattle off the travel (non-work related), sexual encounters and experiences we've all had but what is the damn point? What does real world experience have to do with the magazine? We're talking about games. As far as a gaming magazine is concerned then they are the be all and end all. Will real life experience teach us that saying stuff like "I will crush you" is stupid? Newsflash champ, we already know. We also know that it can be pretty damn funny, as do the majority of our readers. Next point. We're self confessed geeks, not nerds and we're sorry if we don't fall into your preconceived notion of what we are meant to be. We're not trying to convince anyone that we are cool. Wilks is probably the least cool person you will ever meet. He admits it in most of his writing. Unless of course it's reverse psychology.

Two final points. Anyone has a right of reply. If you take offense to us taking offense to your offensive statements (and joining non-sequiturs) then write to us and let us know. Same goes for the cranky readers in 137 - if you have something further to say then let us know. Just try to back your arguments with verifiable facts. It usually works better than simply making accusations. Finally, as we have said on countless occasions in the past, we can only review games when we get the code so if you can get a game before our review comes out then you should have a go at the distributor for not giving it to us in time rather than at us. We also have this little thing called a lead time (also mentioned ad-nauseum) which means that everything you read in the magazine was written nearly a month before the magazine hits shelves meaning that we have to get games at least a month early for reviews to be timely. More often than not we do.

HONG OR WONG?

Heya Hyperinis,

Up until now, I've been under the same belief as everyone else that Amos Hong is the lovable, innocent mascot that wouldn't harm a gnat. All this changed when I was reading an age-old Hyper (issue 30, April 1996, p.66) and stumbled across a review of Road Rash on Playstation... written by one Amos Wong! My theory is that perhaps our beloved Amos Hong knocked off and (not-quite-perfectly) assumed the name and identity of the former Hyper writer. Maybe his "accidental" PC Powerplay karaoke cd contained subliminal messages for his evil intentions (whatever they may be)? His invention of "Evil Malky" suggests that he is trying to create a scapegoat to take the blame for his future, unspeakable acts. Didn't it occur to you that Amos has been just that bit too perfect? Lord Seafood was a rising reviewer back in 1996 and reached the rank of editor a few years later. And then he mysteriously stepped down not too long after Amos Hong "appeared". David Wildgoose was also a reviewer back then and now he is but a ghost. Coincidences? Unlikely. These men knew too much. Indeed, supernatural contact with the ghost of David Wildgoose or a breaking of the silence from Lord Seafood may now be your only hope... or has this letter come too late?

In all seriousness though, that is a pretty wacky coincidence. Did Amos contribute a review once in his younger (nappy wearing) days and get credited slightly wrong? Who is this Amos Wong? Please clear this up for me, so I can end these nightmares of disemboweled Hyper staff scatted across the cracked Redfern pavement.

Laterish!

Nick

PS. I should actually thank Amos for my Outrun 2 drawing comp prize- he is inspiration! Made my day dude!

You do realise that calling us Hyperinis implies that we are female don't you? Male should end in O, so Hyperino. Oh well, now that gender confusion is out of the way we'll get to the heart of the matter. Until you made your salient point about Amos Wong and Lord Seafood we didn't know the true malicious intent of Amos - we'll definitely be keeping an eye on him from now on. "Too perfect" indeed - how could we have been so blind? Seriously though, Amos Wong is a different

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person altogether (you may remember the Amos dart board in NMS) and last we heard he was living in Japan. If only we had a wayback machine and could use the real Amos for the review and not this two-bit imposter.

WAR AND PEACE

HEALTH: 80% - AMMO: 53% - CHUCKLES: 4%

Greetings Hyper crew.

Firstly, I would like to extend my congratulations to you all for continuing to produce such a fine publication. Well done. The gods shall surely bless your homes with hordes of violin-playing beetles and a squid that is more than capable upon the congas.

Point-Get!

I have written this to basically address matters which were raised by a few letters in last month's issue. So come join me, ladies and gentlemen, as I spin you a tale involving the theories of gaming humour....

I have been a regular reader for quite some time now, and I would like to state that I purchase Hyper for 2 main reasons; the info/reviews ... AND the humour. So now I ask you; ..... why in the name of Satan's bathwater am I reading letters which COMPLAIN about the humour within said magazine? I cannot fathom how anyone out there would be able to even conceive of any negative comments against gems such a 'BLAU' or 'Does Mannerism'.

I mean, c'mon people ... Lighten up! These are all personal in-jokes which have been created from the friendships amongst the Hyper staff, (I assume...) and have grown stronger and more complex with each new issue or late-night Redfern gaming session. However, this is only MY hypothesis regarding the origin of these 'Hyperisms' and I have always been a strong supporter of the old belief; "To each their own". So if you disagree with some of the writers' views or senses of humour; fair enough ... but don't go and hack on them just because you may not get all of their obscure gags.

Hell, I don't even get all of them, because I have never even met these people. I simply understand that gaming on a regular basis often generates many a bizarre, yet personally-funny, moment of pure gaming hilarity. These moments, in turn, often graduate into an 'in-joke';, be it a regular catchphrase such as 'BLAU' or a strange fixation upon gaming clichés... such as crates.

After being a regular reader for enough time, the Hyper crew almost become like distant friends with whom you can share game humour.

[above] David Spiller creates the Half-Life 2 Mannerism Mod

Employee of the Month

NAME: Maurice Branscombe
ALSO KNOWN AS: "Moe", "Moemar", "Hey you there behind the bushes".
HYPER POSITION: Jebus.
BEGAN WRITING FOR HYPER: Technically it was issue 123 in January of last year, after having won a particularly generous promotion whereby I got a free trip to Melbourne. I didn't actually start "writing writing" for Hyper until a couple issues later though...
MOST FAMOUS FOR: Winning a particularly generous promotion whereby I got a free trip to Melbourne.
GAME OF THE MOMENT: The game of life (not the board game...).
FAVOURITE MOVIE: A very close tie between the Rainbow Brite movie and The Evil Dead.
FAVOURITE BOOK: Magazines.
FAVOURITE HYPER IN-JOKE: Any caption with the words "The nature of Monkey was... Irrepressible!"
LIKES: Pirate speak, my Bros, my Hos, the smell of napalm in the morning, never having met Bryce.
DISLIKES: Jerks, seagulls, jerk seagulls.

Why, back in the day I used to regularly use this brand of joke; "Hello ladies. I'm rather good at golf. My name is Putty McSwing". Well then one day I came across the phrase, "...more depth than Deepy McDeep..." in the pages of Hyper. I must say I cracked up with laughter because I found that someone else out there was a fellow traveller upon the same crooked humour path.

Part of Hyper's charm, in my opinion, has always been the way in which these in-jokes pop up at random intervals during my journey throughout the pages.

The obscure sense of mystery that often surrounds many of these gags is what helps give them their potency, and I am always more than pleased to encounter yet another incident involving Amos, 'Tekken-wordplay' or 'paaanch'. These page-bound antics allow me to further enjoy my Hyper experience because I know that it is the same type of bizarre hi-jinx that I get up to during certain gaming sessions, ... and I bet a lot of other gamers do too.

As gamers, we all need gaming humour. At times, it helps us get by. It can be like the smooth, refreshing beverage ghat allows us to consume a bad meal. ... Trust me. Just try swallowing 'Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi' without a few bottles of gaming humour. (A friend showed me Han Solo's gun-butt knockout. I cried with laughter)

So now fellow readers of Hyper, I submit to y'all a fresh concept; ... I ask that you write in to Hyper and make public your own personal gaming humour elements. Catchphrases, taunts, hidden meanings or whatever ... Always remember the holy mantra of the gaming comedian; "One man's poor game, is another man's comedic goldmine."

I shall now get the ball a-bouncin'. Firstly, I shall don my mystical 'Listing Hat' ... which allows me a +12 listing bonus ...

1. You have to piss yourself laughing as Link chases those melon-headed, stump-limbed children around the island in Wind Waker ... Not a single adult on the island even pauses to question this mysterious, elfin stranger as to his intentions regarding these fleeing youths. ... You gotta love subtext. ... Endless possibilities.

2. Combat rolls in games are funny. Especially when done at inappropriate times.

3. Screaming the name 'Mike Haggar' (from Final Fight) at each other during crucial gaming moments is always a big favourite amongst me and my gaming ilk.

4. "Lets smash some pots to pass the time." I remember when I first read that line in Ocarina of Time (I think). I was in fits of laughter. That phrase is now a regular fixture in my everyday speech; whether I am gaming or not.

5. I have always been fond of creating elaborate and bizarrely intricate back-stories for fighting game characters ... during the match.

6. Fighting a boss character simply named "BOSS" is damn funny. I believe that shall be all for

now. My apologies for the grand length of this letter, but I felt it had to be said.

Keep up the humour.

Keep up the random Simpsons/Futurama/Family Guy references.

Keep up the captions.

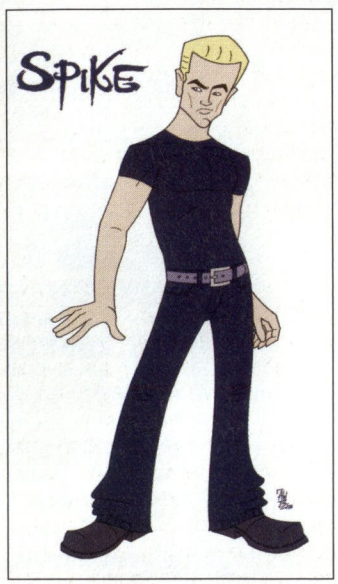
Long Live the Captions.

The GTA:SA review featured one of the best moments of captioning gold ever. There was a picture of a guy beneath a hovering chopper. Caption: "In an unexpected twist, the helicopter distributed free candy." That is museum-worthy humour, gents.

Farewell to y'all at the Hyper School. You do damn good work ...and if ever a rival school wishes to challenge your honour; I am proficient in many a kung-fu style. I was trained by Thunderleg. (... Hehehe, Thunderleg. What a git.) I shall answer call ...I've got to go smash some pots ...

Hank Moore. 2005.

Hi Hank - it's letters like these that make doing our job worthwhile. Thanks champ - you hit the nail on the head. Wilks is doing a double devil sign in the background in tribute to your rockingness. Legend!



BUFFY AND ANGEL WINNERS

We got a whole host of great entries in the Buffy/Angel DVD comp we ran a few issues back, and these are the two that we deemed most "win-worthy". Just thought you might like to check 'em out...

[Spike] Jonathan Snow reckons Spike wants to get on the disco bus

[Buffy] Jessica Slinger is a demon with Mr Pointy (her pencil)

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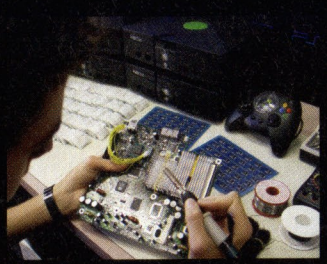

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The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
2	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
3	▲	SingStar Party Bundle	All Other
4	◆	Eyetoy: Play 2 Pack	Compilation
5	▼	The Incredibles	Adventure
6	▲	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
7	▼	WWE Smackdown vs Raw	Sports
8	▼	Ratchet & Clank 3: Arsenal	Adventure
9	◆	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
10	◆	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Adventure

TOP 10 PlayStation Games Over $30

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Yu-Gi-Oh Forbidden Mem	Strategy
2	✪	Dragonball Z: Ult Battle 22	Action
3	✪	FIFA 2004	Sports
5	▼	Firebugs	Racing
4	▲	Colin McRae Rally Ptm	Racing
6	✪	No Fear Downhill Mt Biking	Sports

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $50

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	Mario Power Tennis	Sports
2	▼	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
3	◆	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Adventure
4	▲	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
5	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
6	▼	The Incredibles	Adventure
7	▼	Goldeneye: Rogue Agent	Action
8	✪	Yu-Gi-Oh Flsebound Kngdm	Strategy
9	◆	Tales Of Symphonia	RPG
10	◆	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
2	▼	Halo 2	Action
3	◆	Fable	RPG
4	◆	The Incredibles	Adventure
5	✪	MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	Adventure
6	▼	SpongeBob Sqrepnts Movie	Adventure
7	▼	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
8	◆	GTA Twin Pack	Adventure
9	▼	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Adventure
10	✪	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Strategy

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims 2	Strategy
2	◆	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
3	◆	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
4	◆	Half Life 2	Action
5	◆	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
6	◆	LOTR Battle Middle Earth	Strategy
7	▲	The Sims Makin' Magic	Strategy
8	▼	The Sims Superstar	Strategy
9	◆	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
10	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $30

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Incredibles	Adventure
2	▲	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
3	◆	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
4	▼	SpongeBob Sqrepnts Movie	Adventure
5	▲	Crash Bandicoot Fusion	Adventure
6	▲	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
7	▲	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
8	▼	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing
9	✪	Kingdom Hrts: Chain Mem	RPG
10	◆	SpongeBob Double Pack	Adventure

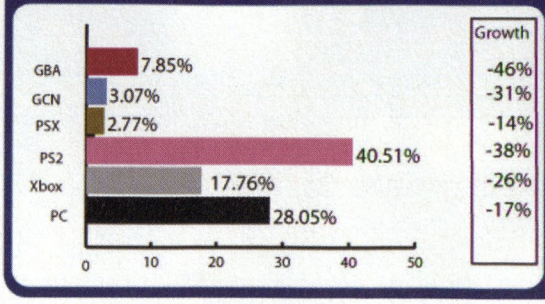
TOP 10 All Full Priced Games

W/E 30th JAN 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: San Andreas	PlayStation 2
2	◆	NFS: Underground 2	PlayStation 2
3	▲	The Sims 2	PC/MAC
4	▲	SingStar Party Bundle	PlayStation 2
5	▲	The Sims Deluxe	PC/MAC
6	▼	Eyetoy: Play 2 Pack	PlayStation 2
7	▼	The Incredibles	PlayStation 2
8	▲	World Of WarCraft	PC/MAC
9	✪	NFS: Underground 2	Xbox
10	▼	Halo 2	Xbox

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

JAN 05 Vs DEC 04 RETAIL SALES 2004



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

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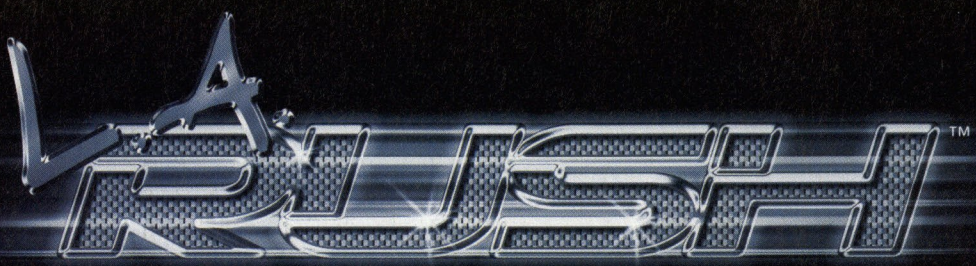

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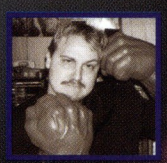
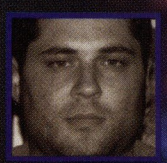

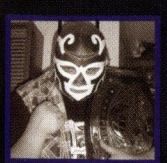

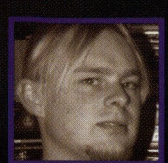

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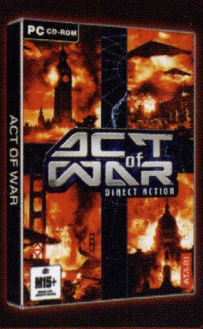

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