C&C: RED ALERT 3
Tongue in cheek strategy returns!

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 2
Read our full review

HYPER

ROCKSTAR TALK GTA IV
New Details Inside

STREET FIGHTER IV
New Screens Inside

Not just another bloody sequel!

NINJA GAIDEN II

THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY
The amnesiac bad-arse is now interactive

TOO HUMAN
The game that refused to die

FALLOUT 3
We talk to Bethesda about their highly anticipated RPG

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS
The reason to own a PSP

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M Moderate violence

PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360

Produced by Omega Force

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Moderate Violence
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Moderate Violence
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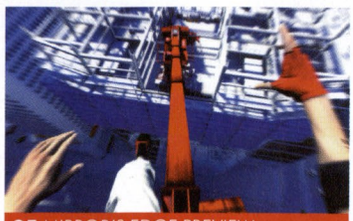

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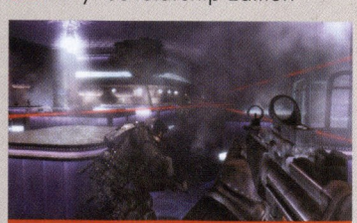

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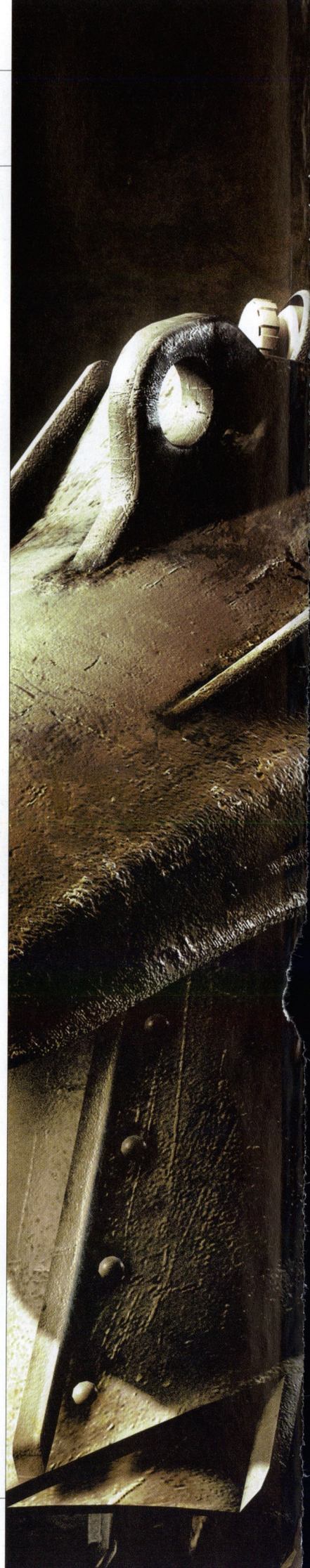

12 FALLOUT 3
The best Post-Apocalyptic RPG returns.
Oblivion with guns this ain't!

Editorial

Every month I get a good chuckle out of some of the press releases that are sent my way. I find it funny how obvious it is sometimes how little the person who writes the release actually knows about the game they are hawking. This month I received a real corker for the World Heroes compilation that's on its way for PS2. For a start the release makes note of how the series is a fan favourite and famous worldwide in fighting game circles. In truth World Heroes is well known in fighting game circles, but not for being a classic. It's known for being a shoddy Street Fighter clone. The release also mentions that the plot of the game – a scientist creating a time machine so he can pit fighters from history against each other – but, even though there are some historical character, the only ones I can remember are those well known historical figures such as a Nazi cyborg, American sportsman and Crude Pacific Islander Racial Stereotype.

Welcome to issue 175. This month we have a hell of a lot of gaming goodness for you including all the goss on the development of Fallout 3 and GTA IV, two of the most anticipated games of the year, a shiny feature on synaesthesia in games and a whole backbreaking crapload of reviews.

This month also calls for your submissions for our upcoming Reader's Top 50 feature. Check out the details of what we need in the letters section. The feature can't work without your input, so set pen to paper, fingers to keyboard or psychic energies to sub channel Z and get your entries coming in.

Until next month.

Daniel Wilks Editor

Hyper Crew

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **God of War: CoO** – *PSP*
   "I'm positively friendly compared to Kratos"
2. **Viking** – *Xbox 360*
3. **Zack & Wiki** – *Wii*
4. **Mario Kart** – *Wii*
5. **Audiosurf** – *PC*

DARREN – Deputy Editor

1. **Condemned 2** – *Xbox 360*
   "Nothing like a bit of the old ultraviolence"
2. **The Experiment** – *PC*
3. **Audiosurf** – *PC*
4. **Bully** – *Wii*
5. **Peggle** – *PC*

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **Peggle** – *Mac*
   "Rather addictive..."
2. **Team Fortress 2** – *PC*
3. **Super Mario Galaxy** – *Wii*
4. **Zak & Wiki** – *Mac*
5. **Feeding Frenzy** – *Mac*

NURY ANTRIM – Some guy

1. **Zack & Wiki** – *Wii*
   "Hooray for not mini-games"
2. **Castlevania: Dracula X** – *PSP*
3. **Lost** – *Xbox 360*
4. **Pirates of the Burning Sea** – *PC*
5. **Audiosurf** – *PC*

HYPER

MAY 2008 ISSUE 175

WRITE TO HYPER!

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SLIM & LITE

PSP

PlayStation Portable

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IN THE PALM OF YOUR HANDS
ON PSP

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Strong violence, Sexual references

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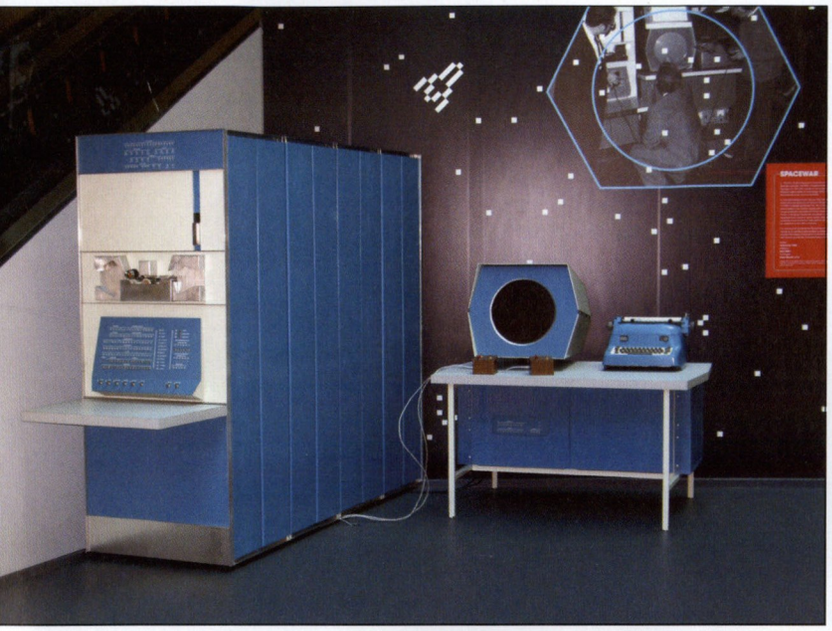
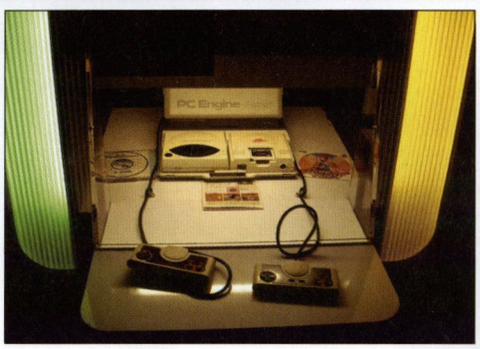
»News





(clockwise from top right) The Odyssey, a virtual reality headset, the PC Engine, and the intel room from BLU base on 2fort.... err... the Space War cabinet

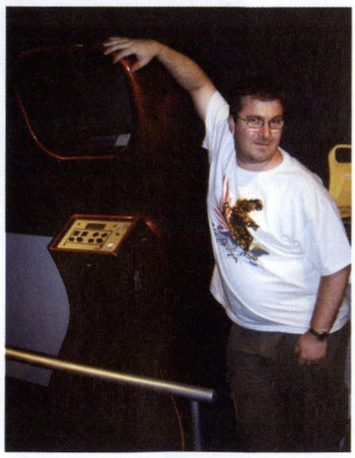
ARCADE!

Game On

Play your way through the history of gaming

We recently had the honour of attending the opening of the Game On exhibition currently being hosted at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne. The exhibition, comprised 125 classic arcade games, including some of the very originals, such as Space War, Computer Space and Pong as well as modern games and gaming consoles, takes a look at the history of gaming. This is no dry history lesson, however. With a few exceptions, all of the arcade machines at the exhibition are playable, giving visitors a good feel for how the art of gaming has changed over the years. Somewhat disappointingly some of the more venerable arcade machines broke after a little use but they have staff on hand to maintain the machines and get them back in full working order. Al Alcorn, the creator of Pong was the special guest at the opening of the travelling event, organised and toured by The Barbican art gallery in London. A devout technologist and something of a mercenary, Alcorn was not shy in talking about how his game, Pong was built on the lie that the game had a distribution deal, ran horribly over budget, that he never saw gaming as anything that would become a particularly big business and how towards the end of his time with Atari, he, and the rest of the original team were actually paid bonuses not to show up to work. You can read our interview with Al Alcorn in the next issue of Hyper.

It's funnier when you can see the original ad poster

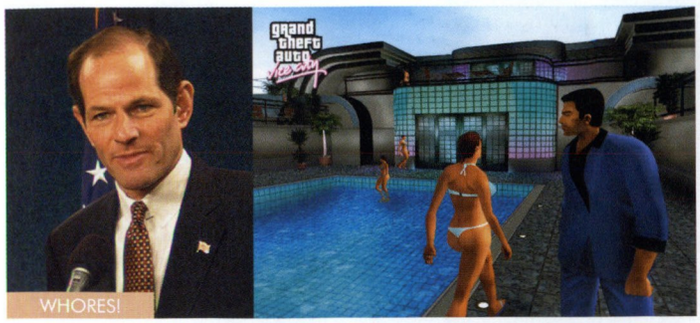


In addition to the playable games, Game On features a number of static exhibits, including a number of classic consoles, including the original Brown Box, created, and autographed by Nolan Bushnell and a theatrette showing machinima, short gaming films and a snapshot of the MMO landscape. Our favourite exhibit, which we dubbed "the Dome of Fail", a no frills exhibit comprised of peripherals and consoles that failed dismally. Unfortunately none of them are playable – but honestly, do you want to risk a migraine just to say that you've played a Virtual Boy?

(above left) The controls for Computer Space suck! (above) Pong featured a beautiful veneer finish

The exhibition will also play host to a number of seminars and talks on various facets of gaming, including World of Warcraft, 8-Bit art and music, the ethics of games, Australian games and that hoary old chestnut, the effects of game violence on the psyche of players. Check the ACMI website for dates and details.

The exhibition runs from Thursday March 6 through to Sunday July 13 with doors open between 10am and 6pm (9pm on Thursdays). Adult tickets are $15. Children and concession are $10. Family passes (2 adults, 2 children) cost $44. More information on the exhibition can be found at www.acmi.net.au.



WHORES!

Do as I say, not as I do

NY Governor caught with his pants down

Taste that? It's something that New York Governor Eliot Spitzer, a long-time opponent to games like Grand Theft Auto and Hitman, has cooked up in the US. It's a dish called irony. And it's absolutely delicious.

In 2005, Spitzer – referred to by supporters as "Mr Clean" – was determined to ensure that videogame content was regulated, and was an advocate for a uniform ratings system. "We must do more to protect our children from excessive sex and violence in the media," he said while on the campaign trail. "A game like 'Grand Theft Auto' ... rewards a player for stealing cars and beating people up. Children can even simulate having sex with a prostitute."

The punchline? In mid-March of 2008, Spitzer was busted by federal wiretap as a client for an international prostitution ring.

Referred to as "Client 9" by official FBI records, the NY Governor engaged the services of a $1000 an hour call girl known as "Kristen" in the room of a Washington, D.C. hotel. Further reports indicate that he spent upwards of $15,000 on at least seven other women from the same agency.

Following the revelation, Spitzer – married for over 20 years and a father of three children – stood down from his government role. "I can and will ask no less of myself," he stated during the announcement. "For his reason I am resigning from the office of governor. I cannot allow my private failings to disrupt the people's work."

Remarkable events, to be sure. We just wonder how Rockstar plans to parody the event in its next GTA game.

CRAPHAT!

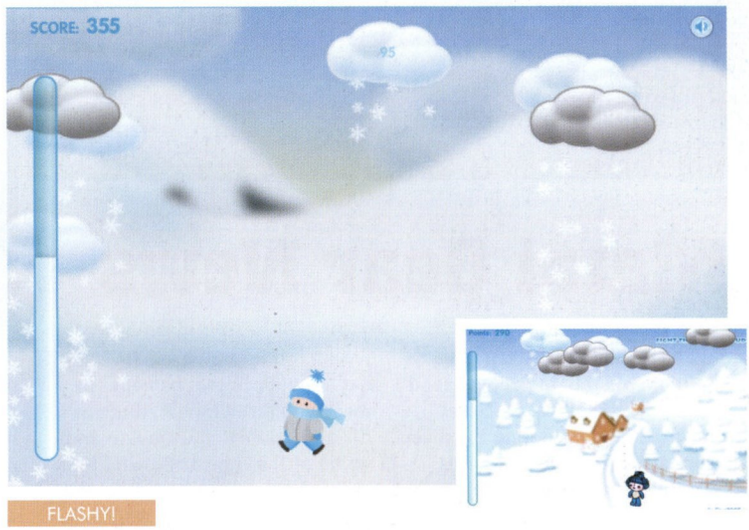
Girl Mugged for PSP

Society reaches new low

If your day's been going too well so far, then please, continue to read on, as this will surely bring your mood down with a crashing thud.

A nine-year old girl in Great Hollands, Bracknell, England, Planet Earth, was browsing through a store with her friend one afternoon. All was fine and dandy, until she was kicked in the leg by an older male, aged around 16-18, and robbed of her PSP.

Sometimes people are tools, and then there's this guy, who lower that mere tooliness and has entered a whole other realm of tool. It doesn't matter if you replace "PSP" with "lollypop": assault and theft is wrong, and when it happens to nine-year-old girls, it's just wronger. More wrong. Whatever.



FLASHY!

There's snow game like this game

Or, to put it another way, there is

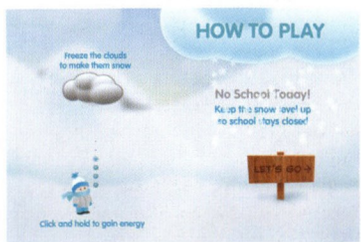
They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but Flash game designer Cadin Batrack is less than thrilled with Beijing right now. The official website for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games housed a promotional Flash game called "Fuwa Fight the Winter Clouds" that was remarkably similar to his own creation, "Snow Day".

Side-by-side comparison shots put forward a compelling argument. The art style between the two is suspiciously alike, if not exactly the same, and the overall concept of each game is one and the same – players must toss up ice cubes into passing clouds to keep the snow flowing.

It could all be a simple coincidence, but based on Batrack's investigations, he's very much doubting it. "They downloaded the swf file from my site, decompiled it, swapped out the little guy for the Fuwa characters, took my name off of it and republished it as their own," he wrote on his blog. "I also took the liberty of decompiling their game and actually found it still contains the sound files from Snow Day, even though they aren't being used in the Olympic version."

The game has since been removed from the Beijing Olympic site, but the incident does nothing to improve China's reputation of piracy, a nation that's been known to copy everything from computer software to theme parks.

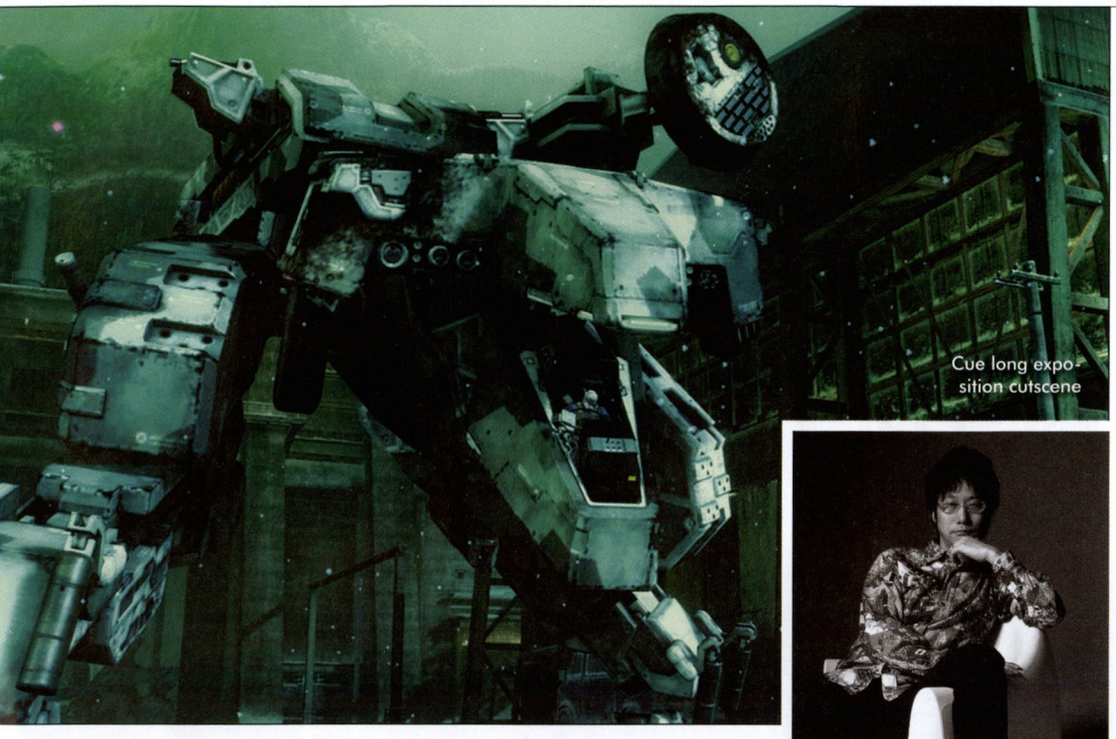
An especially humorous coda is the message on the Olympics site threatening prosecution for anyone who plagiarises its content. Maybe hypocrisy should be a new Olympic event?



CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at *captionthis@next.com.au* with **Caption This Part 100** in the subject line.

Caption it!



Cue long exposition cutscene

MOAR!

Metal Gear News

New movie, new IP

You would be forgiven for thinking that Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima is a closet film director, considering the sheer volume of cinematic sequences he packs into each of Snake's adventures. Which kind of makes it fitting that progress is being made on a film adaptation of Metal Gear Solid: talks have commenced on the script and director.

Film producer Michael De Luca has announced that he hopes to meet with Kirt Wimmer, director of Equilibrium and Ultraviolt and writer of The Thomas Crown Affair and Sphere, to pen and shoot the Metal Gear Solid movie. Kojima is currently attacked as executive producer. Eeeee!

In more Metal Gear news, Konami president Fumiaki Tanaka revealed Kojima has a new game in the works. Beyond the fact that it's a new intellectual property, nothing else is currently known about it, meaning we'll have to wait for an official announcement – and that's unlikely to happen until after Metal Gear Solid 4 has had its time in the sun. Kojima's clearly a busy man these days!

OVERFLOW

Bioshock 2 Exists!

■ And Ken Levine's involved! It's being developed by 2K Marin, it's set for a Q4 2009 release, it's planned for the Xbox 360 and PC, and early reports indicate it's a prequel. Hmm...

Borderlands Delayed

■ *What was once scheduled for a 2008 release is now not arriving until sometime in 2009. Take-Two says the delay is necessary "to allow additional development time for this highly anticipated game and provide a better balance in the release of Take-Two's triple-A titles."*

Mad Max: The Game

■ Ex-God of War director Cory Barlog has formed a creative partnership with film director George Miller, and guess what they're working on? A Mad Max Game. "Mad Max: Fury Road" is based on an abandoned film sequel and represents the first videogame foray for Miller, who created the Mad Max franchise in 1979. Even though it's early days yet, it's unlikely that original film star Mel Gibson will be approached for involvement.

HOSTILE!

Play time is over

EA gets hostile with Take-Two

It's almost like something out of a serial killer movie: Boy meets girl, boy wants girl, girl says no, boy sets about watching her every move and does everything in his power to have her for himself. Except in this instance, the boy is EA, and the girl is Take-Two.

John Riccitiello. Soon, all your base are belong to him

Further to their earlier desires to acquire the Grand Theft Auto publisher, EA has officially ramped up to a hostile takeover, appealing directly to shareholders with a payout offer of $US26 per share. EA boss John Riccitiello said in a statement, "This is a great opportunity for Take-Two shareholders. We believe Take-Two investors will see our tender offer as the best way to maximize the value of their investment in Take-Two. This tender offer provides a clear process to complete the proposed transaction. For EA shareholders, the combination would add additional intellectual properties to our already strong portfolio and welcome Take-Two's talented creative teams to the great development organization we've built at EA."

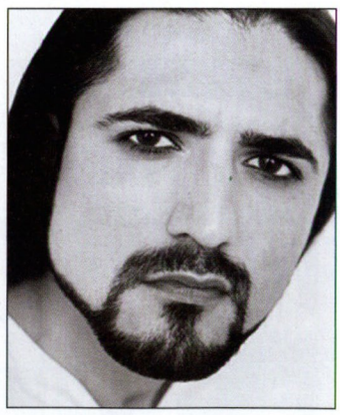
EA's offer expires on April 11. Take-Two, meanwhile, has urged its shareholders not to sell. We'll be watching intently to see how this turns out.

PERFECT!

PoP Casting

Sometimes life is strange

You hear all about improbable coincidences all the time, bu tthis one takes the cake. The results are in for a preliminary casting survey for the upcoming Jerry Bruckheimer Prince of Persia movie. Leaving aside the fact that Jerry Bruckheimer is somehow going to make everything in the movie either explode or crash, the front-runner to play the Prince is pretty exceptional indeed. David K. Zandi is a motion picture executive, actor, fashion model and champion equestrian who has trained in fencing and Roman sword fighting. Sounds about perfect, right? Well, how about this for a kicker - Zandi also happens to be an honest to god Persian Prince! Apparently Zandi is one of the last surviving male descendants of the Zand Dynasty, which ruled between 1747 - 1779. Leaving aside that the dynasty wasn't in power for too long, the only thing that could make David K. Zandi a more perfect casting choice would be some serious Parkour skills and the ability to manipulate time. Oh yeah - lets hope he can act as well. Of course, being a Bruckheimer film, being able to act isn't a huge criteria when it comes to casting.



He's so dreamy!

BAD COP NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

Can't Have, Not Yours

I have many pet peeves. I hate people who chew with their mouths open or simply chew too loudly. I think I'll kill the next person who answers their (expletive deleted) mobile phone in the cinema. People who sit next to you on public transport and insist on telling you about the hip operation they've just had, or how their uncle/brother/husband/friend has "the cancer" make me want to stick knitting needles in my ears. I guess I'm just a rather intolerant person all round, and one, more often than not, willing to tell people the truth about how I feel. Over the last month or so a new personal hatred has reared it's ugly head. It's a hatred I think a lot of you reading will be able to empathise with. I really, really can't stand this modern "we didn't make it for you" mentality that developers and PR people seem all too ready to adopt when you're less than worshipful of their title.

At the time of me writing this we are yet to receive Turning Point: Fall of Liberty review code and just between you and me I don't think we're all that likely too given my rocky relationship with PR and the terrible review scores the game has been garnering so far. Be that as it may, Spark Unlimited, the developers of Turning Point have, in light of the poor review scores, gone on record saying that the game is not for core gamers. To quote the Spark CEO Craig Allen, "You know, I think that when you try to do games that are about a mass market, and Turning Point is definitely a high concept idea, that with the time and money we had we did the best to execute on, our target was not really the core gamer".

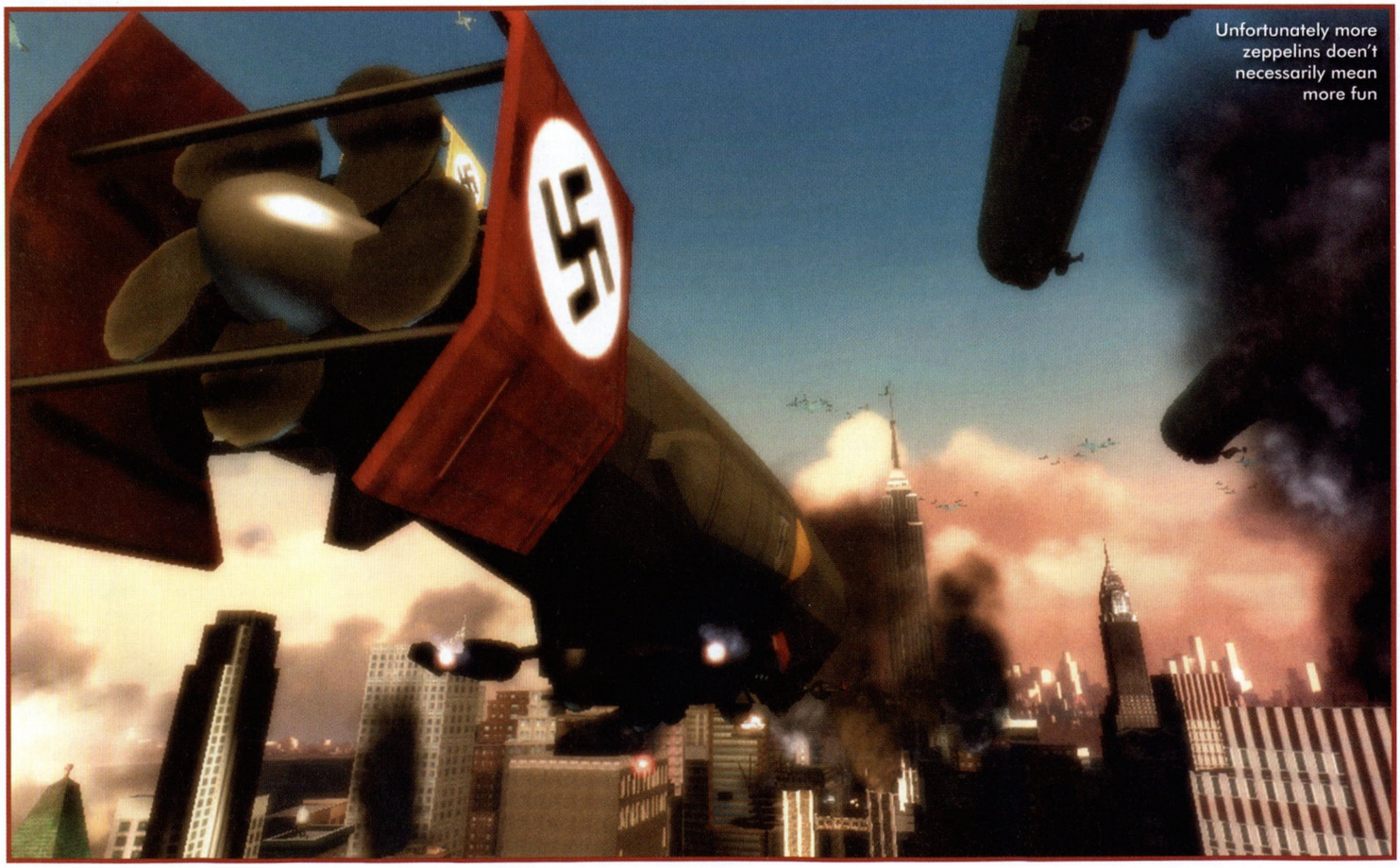
Let's look at the term High Concept for a second. It's a Hollywood term used to define a style of film that is a guaranteed crowd pleaser, usually working off a simple plot that can be summarised in a few lines with some big name stars, extremely polished production values. The term is thought to have originated to describe either Jaws or Star Wars, two films that define the high concept genre, put bums on seats and kept everyone happy. Over time the concept of High Concept has changed and the term is now used quite often to mean that the film is seeking to pander to the lowest common denominator. I would argue that in light of the poor critical reception, Mr. Allen has claimed that his game was designed to pander to the ignorant masses, not those who can tell good from bad (meaning, as far as I'm concerned, basically everyone who doesn't enjoy Rob Schneider films).

Something being classed as high concept doesn't necessarily mean it will have a frosty critical reception. Neither does it mean that it will be an instant money spinner as Paris Hilton's last cinematic escapade, The Hottie and the Nottie so clearly illustrates – it only managed to clear just over $25000 in its opening weekend, averaging out at about $249 per theatre it was shown in.

I really can't stand this "we didn't make it for you" mentality

So where does this leave Turning Point? The only way I can translate this high concept excuse is that Spark Unlimited have either created a bad game and are trying to save face by claiming that the ephemeral "mass market" will love it or that as developers they have been lazy and have made a true high concept game in the derogatory sense of the term. Who wouldn't be able to overlook poor controls, shoddy pacing and lacklustre AI when you have Nazi zeppelins in NY!

Lest it sound like I'm simply bashing on one company, I'm just using this as the most recent, and public example. There have been many other instances of the claim that a game is not for the core gamer. More often than not this claim is made about Wii games. It seems as though anyone can release a severely substandard game and excuse it by saying it's being made for the mass market. Mass market crap is still crap. All developers are doing when they foist poorly made games on the "casual gamer" (I'm still not sure what a casual gamer is supposed to be) is fostering the unfortunate opinion that games are juvenile, base entertainments. Just because a "casual gamer" isn't part of the "core" it doesn't mean that that can't tell a turd from a diamond.



Unfortunately more zeppelins doen't necessarily mean more fun

RADIOACTIVE DREAMS
Bethesda talks Fallout 3

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

Category: **RPG** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Bethesda** • Due: **Late 2008**

Bethesda has found themselves working with one of the most rabidly beloved franchises around with Fallout 3. Although it has been quite a number of years since the last true Fallout game (devoted fans don't include Fallout Tactics and Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel as being true Fallout games), the series' fan base has remained strong and hugely vocal about their obsession. As soon as it was announced that Bethesda was working on the game, the Fallout message-boards were bombarded with pronouncements that the game would be nothing but Oblivion with guns, and the revelation that the game would be played in anything but an isometric view was met with equally damning criticism.

We recently had the chance to have a chat with Gavin Carter, Lead Producer of Fallout 3. The first question we had to ask was, given the nature of Fallout fans, how (if at all) this rabid fan devotion has influenced the development/creation of the game? Although it was a question he's probably heard a hundred times before, Gavin has managed to retain his sense of humour, saying, "It certainly hasn't made things boring!" That's probably an understatement and a half. He continued, saying, "My philosophy on the whole thing is that, as in life, you have to please yourself before you please anyone else. As harsh as people might be on the Internet, we're still our own harshest critics. Making the game simply be "good" isn't enough for us – we want it to set the world on fire. In that way of thinking, the debate spurred by the fans is great for us. It reminds us how big the stakes are, how badly people want to see a great Fallout game, and it encourages us to turn the volume up to 11 with everything we do."

My, what nice phallic imagery you have there

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

It's not uncommon to hear a developer stating that they want to revolutionise things, or "set the world on fire" as Gavin stated, but in this case we're actually inclined to believe him. In a recent interview it was stated that Fallout 3 will be somewhere between 50% and 80% of the size of Oblivion, a move that some may look at as a step backwards. Mr. Carter had this to say, "The main reason is simply that we can lavish more detail on each individual element when there's not quite as much raw quantity of things vying for our time. Quests now have multiple solutions and characters have more developed stories and dialog. I don't think anyone will see this as a step back. The world in Fallout 3 is still bursting at the seams with content. And it's still huge." Keeping on that line of questioning, we asked Gavin if there would be drivable vehicles or a fast transport system in the game. Without giving too much away he said, "We don't have any usable vehicles in Fallout 3, but there is a way to fast travel."

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Fans allowing franchises to progress naturally instead of insisting that things remain static

That emphasis on details, we think, is really the key point to Fallout 3. Rather than the simple quest vendors and expansive yet empty outdoor spaces that characterized Oblivion (and Morrowind before it), all of the NPC characters in Fallout 3 will feature fully fledged personalities and conversation arcs rather than simple keyword based info dumps. The decisions the player makes throughout the course of the game will also influence the way NPCs react to them as well. On the topic of NPCs, and storytelling in general, the original Fallout was a rather grim game with elements of »

Yes, Dogmeat makes a welcome return

» Quests now have multiple solutions and characters have more developed stories and dialog

» elements of black humour, whereas Fallout 2 focused more in finding humour than it did the grim realities of post-apocalyptic life. So where will Fallout 3 sit in terms of humour?

" We try to keep things closer to the first game in terms of humor. Less of the over-the-top stuff from Fallout 2, and we avoid making any jokes that reference pop-culture or anything outside of the game. Humor is always somewhat in the eye of the beholder, but I think our designers have done a tremendous job balancing the bleakness of the setting with some levity. That's really one of the key tenets of the Fallout universe."

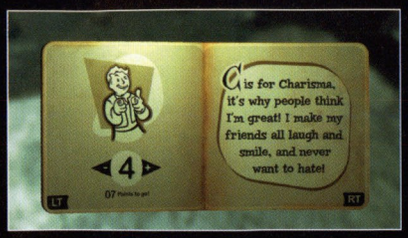
IT'S NOT A BLOODY FPS

Now for some controversy. Perhaps one of the biggest shifts between the earlier games and Fallout 3 is the change from third-person isometric to a first-person perspective. This has lead many a Fallout fan to accuse the game, without even seeing it, of being nothing more than an FPS. So what does the move to a first person perspective mean for the game?

"For the most part, we love first person gameplay because it gets you into the world and character so much more. "Immersion" is kind of a word that people love to hate, but I do feel that there's an immediacy to first-person gameplay that's lacking in distant 3rd-person games. They're a bit more detached, which works for some type of games, but I love being able to get right up close to the art in the game, or to see the monster rear up and

» we love first person gameplay because it gets you into the world and character so much more

"A headspin is not a legitimate dance move!"



put a claw right into my face. It gets me into the game that much more. Also, don't forget that you can play the game from an over-the-shoulder 3rd person perspective. It's a definite and dramatic improvement in playability from the Oblivion 3rd person camera." So, from this, does the new perspective sacrifice any integral elements of the classic Fallout vibe? "I don't think so. If anything, I think those elements are enhanced, because you can get up close to things and see the finer strokes we've put into the game world. Things like watching a dead mutant's eyeball roll down a hill, or seeing the Vault-Tec, Corvega, and other advertisements we've come up with to colour the gameworld, or little details like the tongue-in-cheek sign inside the coin-operated fallout shelter that says "Wait for radiation to clear. Enjoy your stay!" I think overall the vibe comes across much better this way."

It's impossible to look at a game without looking at the developer's past exploits, especially when the developer is responsible for a game a groundbreaking and beloved as Elder Scrolls: Oblivion, a giant, free roaming RPG teeming with encounters and quests. We asked Mr. Carter what lessons Bethesda learned during the development of Oblivion. "Far too many to list." So how has this influenced the development of Fallout 3? "We're always striving to get better with each game we do, and lessons learned are always applied going forward. In some ways I wish we could just do the same game over and over and get better each time, but that would get stale pretty quick. So we're always refining things and trying to get closer to perfection, but we'll never stop coming up with new crazy things to try to move the genre forward, even if they hit a bit raw here and there. I think our games are always better for taking those big chances."

YOU ARE SPECIAL

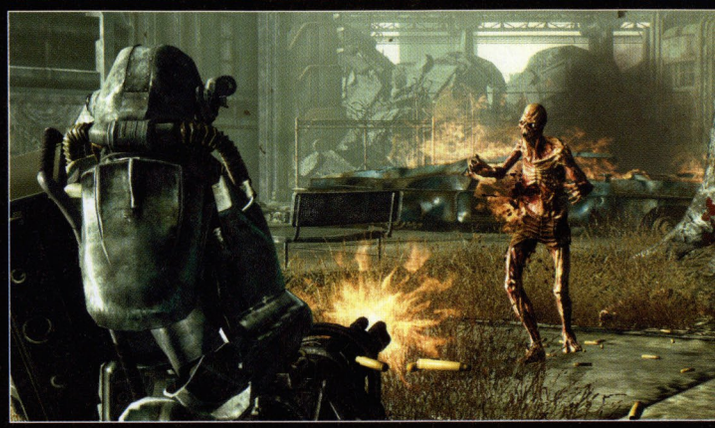
The next big question, then, is how the game will be presented. It's the third (real) game in the franchise, albeit one with a new developer. So will the game be presented as a standalone or will it be referencing the other games in the franchise? "We certainly love the old games and have a number of elements that are directly linked back to the originals, like the Brotherhood of Steel. Of course, it has now been 10 years since Fallout 2 came out, so we've got to assume that a large number of people will be coming at this game either from a completely fresh perspective or simply remember the broad details of the older games. We try and balance the old elements out with enough exposition to make sure it's not confusing for a new person while still being very unique. Having a plot that's separated from the originals in terms of time and location helps out quite a bit."

So how is it working from an existing franchise, especially one so loved by the gaming community? Are there elements (from both a thematic and game design perspective) from the original games that apply seamlessly to the new installment, or are Bethesda throwing out the rulebook and starting with a clean slate? "We were always big fans of the Fallout series so it's really amazing to be working in that universe. In general we look at all the elements individually. As far as design goes, most of the background stat stuff comes over seamlessly. We love SPECIAL and are using it basically whole as it was in the originals as the Fallout 3 character system. Game mechanics are where we take a bit more of a critical eye. As I mentioned, it's been 10 years since the last game in the main series, so we want to make sure Fallout 3 takes advantage of all the advances the genre as a whole has made since then."

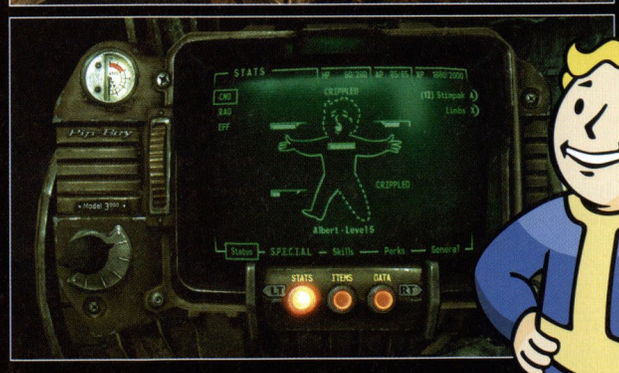
RON PERLMAN

It's no secret that Hyper has a bit of a man crush on RON PERLMAN (the man so great his name can only be spelled in capital letters). What might come as a bit more of a surprise is the fact that our love affair (our very manly, non-homoerotic love affair) with RON started with his opening narration of Fallout II. We've joked for a while that it seems to be the law that RON PERLMAN (all praise his name) features in a voice-acting role in any game being developed at the moment. We had to know, then, would RON PERLMAN (glory be unto him) make a return to the Fallout franchise? "RON PERLMAN'S involvement in Fallout games should definitely be made into a law! War never changes, after all. He reprises his role as the intro and outro narrator in Fallout 3 — It wouldn't be the same without him." So what about other voice talent? "Liam Neeson lends his voice and acting chops to the role of the player's father. We were thrilled to be able to get him. We may have other announcements in the future, but nothing I can talk about right now." Even though we have no facts to support our supposition, we're hoping that the voice cast will be made up of actors who have survived the apocalypse, such as Michael Biehn, Gary Busey, Dennis Hopper, Denis Quaid, Christopher Lambert and maybe Linda Hamilton. OK, so technically Linda Hamilton died before the apocalypse but that's just semantics.

From what we've seen so far, Fallout 3 is shaping up to be one of the games of 2008, combining roleplaying, fast paced gunfights and turn based strategic combat. We can't wait to get our hands on some code. It's high time we visited the dark future again. «



Not Pictured: Ayatollah of Rock and Rollah!



GTA IV

Rockstar spills the beans

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

Category: **Action** • Players: **1+**
Developer: **Rockstar** • Due: **Soon**

We recently had a chance to sit down and have a chat with Dan Houser, the VP of Creative at Rockstar about their highly anticipated upcoming next gen game Grand Theft Auto 4, the release of which is all but guaranteed to become one of the defining events in the 2008 gaming calendar.

HYPER: Did you feel kind of backed into a corner with what you could do with GTA IV with all the copycats and clones hitting the market and saturating us with open world games?

Dan Houser: No. We do what we do, and we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make unbelievable entertainment, and really push to make games that are groundbreaking and innovative and progressive. The very nature of copying is a lack of innovation, so there doesn't seem much to worry about in that regard! The pressure for us was to make a game that would literally amaze people and make them elated that they just bought an expensive new piece of hardware to play the game on, not on the fact some people have made poor copies of our games.

The GTA franchise is looked upon as one of those great, unassailable constants in the modern gaming scene - how hard is it to live up to the expectations lumped on you?

We are really into it, so for us it is a pleasure. By that I mean, we want to make games, and we want to make the best games we possibly can. The whole team is really committed so most of the pressure is internally generated. Obviously, we try to make a game that fans will love, but we have to keep surprising them, as innovation and transformation are a vital part of any long-term creative endeavour.

Further on from that, the previous few GTA games have all been variations on a theme/technology rather than full sequels - was there anything aside from a console generation shift that prompted the development of GTA IV?

I think all three of the PS2 releases were very progressive for their time – even though they were linked thematically and had some shared technology - and most things had been radically overhauled by the time we got to San Andreas.

For GTA IV, given the success and relative saturation of the previous games, given the enormous scope of San Andreas and given the change in hardware, we wanted to massively evolve the game, changing both technology completely, and the tone, so that the whole package felt like a seamless high- definition videogame and unlike anything people had played before. It still had to be very accessible and easy to play, but much deeper and more engaging.

What has the shift in console technology allowed you to do that you were incapable of doing before?

> we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make unbelievable entertainment

Everything much better! With the graphics it is blindingly obvious, but also the physics is completely revolutionary and will change action games forever. With story, we can both push out more lines of dialogue in real time, so there is much more (and more varied) conversation while you are driving, but also, due to better models and improved facial animation we can go in much closer in cutscenes, giving them a radically different quality. The A.I. is far better - the world feels much more alive. Every change is approached from a technology perspective and a design or content perspective at the same time, so every change is in part technological, especially given the fact we maxed out the power of the PS2 with San Andreas. I suppose the other thing is the multiplayer component - we could not have done that as expansively on previous hardware, and it is really incredibly fun.

How will the Xbox 360 DLC be incorporated into the game?

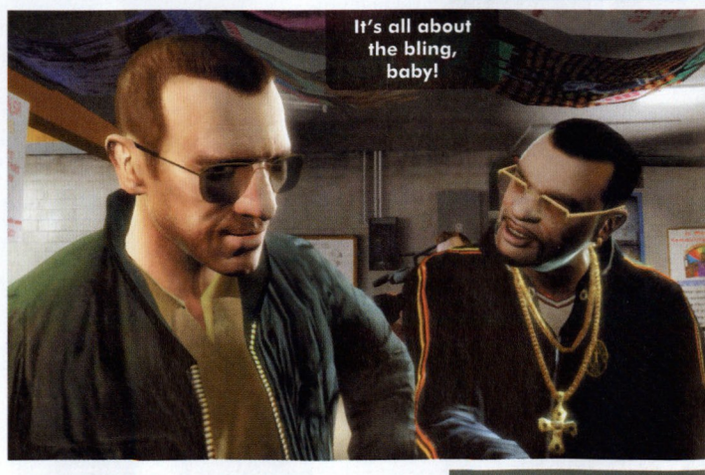
We are 100% focused on the main game at this point.

On the flip side, will PS3 owners have anything special to prompt them to buy GTA IV on the Sony machine?

Hopefully the game itself is pretty special!

Are there any plans to release follow up games using the technology in the vein of Vice City or San Andreas?

We've got hundreds of ideas for what might come next, but we are really focused on this game and launching it successfully at this point.



It's all about the bling, baby!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some details on the multi-player and a guarantee on paper that Rockstar aren't simply going to remake the game a handful of times

In terms of scale, was it difficult to develop a city for IV that is smaller than San Andreas without it feeling like a backwards step?

No. Our goal in all things was high definition - we wanted a smaller environment so we could put a lot more detail into it. The increased intimacy felt to us what next generation gaming would be all about.

From what we've seen so far, GTA IV has been a huge departure from previous GTA games due to the sense of immersion engendered by the fleshed-out characters. Why the shift in style?

Well, for us, GTA games have always been about a complete integrated experience in which graphics, physics, audio, dialogue and characterisation dovetail and complement one another. This overall experience is what makes the game special. So when we made the graphics more vivid and realistic, the characterisation and dialogue had to follow, as did the physics, storyline ... everything really. The game still feels like GTA, and still has the spirit of GTA, just at a higher and more detailed resolution.

What would you point out as the most significant new feature in GTA IV?

The world - the city and life we have put in it - it is really different to any game environment that people have seen before, and I think it will amaze people - it feels like a real place and is full of things to do, like a real place. «

Batter Up!

THE GAME THAT WOULDN'T DIE

Too Human

Silicon Knights rescues Too Human from development hell

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

Category: **Action** • Players: **1-4**
Developer: **Silicon Knights** • Due: **Q3 2008**

Silicon Knights' many admirers have grown accustomed to long waits. The last original game to emerge from the studio was the survival horror epic Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem. This GameCube exclusive thrilled critics and fans with its innovative approach to player psychology. So much so that few now recall that the game was originally promised to Nintendo 64 owners.

The Canadian studio's current project, sci-fi adventure Too Human, has endured an even more troubled gestation. Originally announced for the PlayStation (that's the first generation PlayStation, not the PS2), Too Human generated significant pre-release buzz. Before Silicon Knights could complete the game, however, it dashed the hopes of PlayStation gamers by entering into an exclusive agreement with arch rival Nintendo. GameCube owners would now be the recipients of Too Human... or would they?

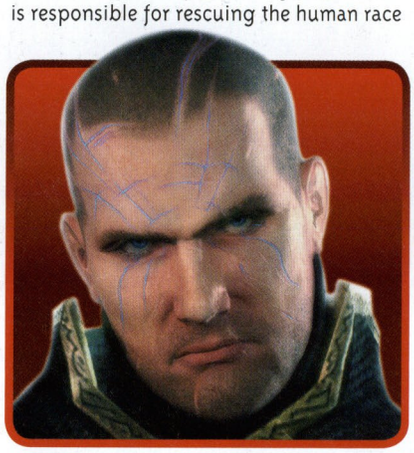
Just as it seemed that Too Human would indeed become a reality, Silicon Knights pulled the plug. It instead announced that the concept would undergo major revisions and appear exclusively on the Xbox 360 as the first of a projected trilogy. Epic Games' much ballyhooed Unreal Engine 3 would ensure that despite being based on a decade old concept, Too Human would look and feel like a next-gen game... or would it?

In July of this year, Silicon Knights announced that they were suing Epic for, among other things, breach of contract. According to Silicon Knights, Epic failed to deliver the engine in the agreed form and provided insufficient after-sale support during the development of Too Human. Epic has since countersued, with both cases unresolved at the time of publication. Perhaps the most startling development (at least for those eagerly awaiting the game) is that Silicon Knights have confirmed that they have entirely forgone Epic's engine and created their own system from scratch.

Many studios would, when faced with costly and demoralising circumstances such as these, elect to abandon the game. However Silicon Knights remains committed and has pledged to deliver the game at some point during 2008. We recently had the opportunity to catch up with Denis Dyack, who is both the president of Silicon Knights and the director of Too Human. He was kind enough to take tell us a little about a project that, despite its tumultuous history, remains at the very peak of many gamers 'must have' lists.

Players will be controlling a character named Baldur. This is an interesting moniker to bestow upon a video game protagonist. Theologically minded gamers (and readers of Marvel Comics' 'Thor') were quick to identify the source of the name. Was it selected solely because it evokes the heroic ideal, or are there further similarities between the Norse pantheon and the events depicted in Too Human? "Too Human attempts to not only parallel, but mirror the mythology as closely as possible within a science-fiction context," Dyack says, emphasising that "all events in Too Human should map to Norse mythology one to one."

Described as a cybernetic god, Baldur is responsible for rescuing the human race from the brink of oblivion. Sadly this will involve a great deal violence. Fortunately, Baldur will be well equipped to terminate his opponents quickly and painlessly. The most recognisable weapon in his arsenal is the iconic (and self aware) sword known as Fenrir. However Baldur certainly isn't averse to the more modern trappings of warfare, with his pistol wielding prowess on display in recently released footage.



» Dyack is convinced that adversarial multiplayer wouldn't be a good fit

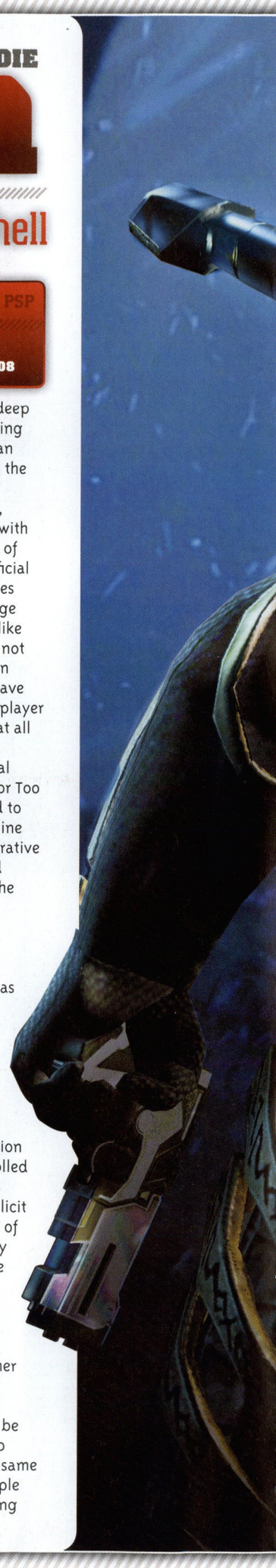
One of the principal themes of Silicon Knight's promotional material is the seamless transition between melee and ranged combat. According to Dyack, "the action mechanics play off the ability to switch between these different types of weapons. Players that master the strengths and weaknesses of the gameplay associated with each type will do much better than those who do not. The system was developed to play casually for long periods of time to help support the deep RPG elements of hunting and gathering loot. So in a simple sense, Too Human plays like a duel analog game along the lines of Geometry Wars."

Addressing combat more broadly, Too Human has drawn comparisons with the likes of 'Devil May Cry' and 'God of War'. Dyack is confident that, superficial similarities aside, Too Human diverges from these well known titles in a range of key areas. "Too Human may look like these games on the surface, but it is not like them at all. It is a fusion of action and deep RPG game elements. We have deep skill trees, class systems, deep player customisation, online co-op play that all combine with fast action."

Dyack is convinced that adversarial multiplayer wouldn't be a good fit for Too Human. The team has chosen instead to concentrate on creating a robust online cooperative experience. "Yes, cooperative play is the way to go," he says, "and ultimately co-op is more suited for the type of game that Too Human is."

Some of the promotional footage for Too Human depicts Baldur being accompanied into battle by support troops, leading to some speculation as to the degree of influence players will have over their actions. Will these puny humans function completely independently of the player or will they, in the manner of squad-based shooters, respond to instructions? "They function independently and cannot be controlled by the player," Dyack says.

Silicon Knights has been quite explicit in positioning Too Human as the first of a trilogy of games. Some gamers may be wary of purchasing an incomplete story, possibly fearing the cancellation of future instalments. Fortunately, it appears that the first game in the series will constitute a complete and fulfilling narrative rather than serving merely as the opening chapter of a much larger tale. "Yes," Dyack says," each game was built to be as self-contained as possible, with no cliff-hangers. The trilogy follows the same themes from game to game, but people should not worry about us not fulfilling



the narrative. Each Too Human story/game is complete in itself."

Although this will be a relief to some, others will be hoping to modify and improve Baldur throughout the course of the adventure. If Baldur is to be the protagonist in all three instalments of the saga, will upgrades earned in one game be carried over to the next? "Baldur will have class, weapon, armour and skill tree specializations, making the combinations of modification almost limitless. Baldur is the protagonist in the entire trilogy. Yes, you will be able to carry over your character and his upgrades from game to game seamlessly."

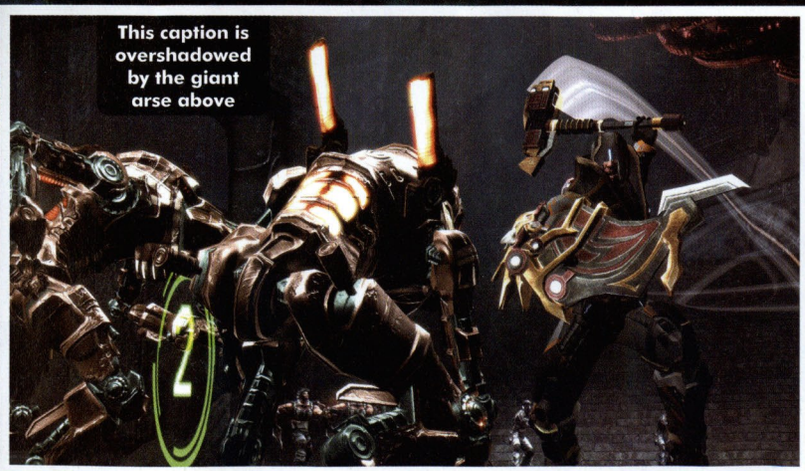
Clearly Silicon Knights have grand plans for this nascent IP. It was recently confirmed that all three chapters of the saga are intended to ship during the Xbox 360 era (some had speculated that the second and third titles could appear on subsequent consoles). Plans are also afoot to support the inaugural release with downloadable content.

We couldn't let Dyack escape without asking him about the long dormant Eternal Darkness property. Five years may have elapsed since the release of Silicon Knights' most acclaimed title, but the demand for a sequel has not subsided. Does the studio have any plans at all in this regard? Dyack was cryptic in his response. "Thank you, he said, "we are glad you like Eternal Darkness and all I can say is that we always have plans..."

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The game actually being released. Sure, it has a release window and it's getting a solid showing but that's happened before.

Will 2008 be remembered as the year when one of the industry's most respected developers collapsed under the weight of its ambition? If the confidence and resolve demonstrated by Dyack and his team in recent months is any guide, it will more likely be remembered as a banner year for the studio. It will be the year that Too Human finally emerged from development hell to wow gamers with its bold art design, innovative combat and grand narrative. ***Erin Marcon***



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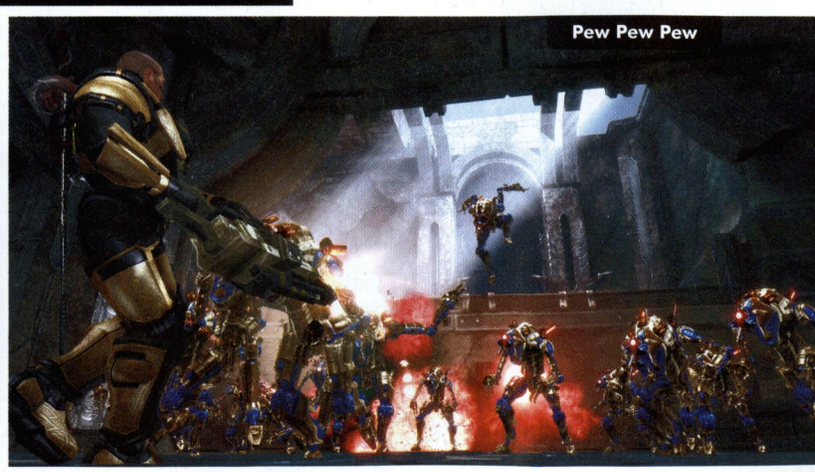


Pew Pew Pew

Ninja Gaiden 2

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

Category: **Action** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Team Ninja** • Due: **June**

One of the biggest complaints about the original Ninja Gaiden was that the game was just too damn hard. Some will argue that the game was challenging, rather than hard, but that's a matter of semantics. Team Ninja had a rather interesting way of dealing with the complaints that their game was too hard – by releasing a slightly revamped, even harder version of the game, Ninja Gaiden Black. A few years later the company remade the game again, this time for the PS3, calling it Ninja Gaiden Sigma. The result of all this remaking, for us at least, was to make us sick to death of the Ninja Gaiden franchise, so we weren't in the most positive frames of mind when we sat down to take a look at the sequel. And yes, it is a real sequel this time around – not another remake.

In a rather unexpected show of humanity, Team Ninja have thrown a bone to the players who found the original Ninja Gaiden too tough. Health and healing are handled very differently to the original game. Instead of simply having a single depleting health bar, the player now has a partially regenerating health bar. When hit, the player takes a portion of permanent damage and a portion of regenerating damage, so the player's health does steadily go down but nowhere near as fast as in the first game. Checkpoints will also heal the player up to full health, allowing the player to restart without damage, unlike the old system that saved not only the player's progress but the damage they had taken as well. For those of you worried that this will make the game too easy, never fear – the distance between checkpoints is determined by difficulty level. What's more, checkpoints will also save a recording of your trip through the level to that point. We're not sure as to the function of these recordings as yet but we're assuming players will be able to edit them in some way to upload their best kills and combos to Xbox Live. The game may also give players a bit of a highlight reel when they restart a game to remind them of what they've just done.

The tea party is over!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Unlockable bonus characters.

NINJAS ARE TOTALLY SWEET

The different approach to difficulty is but one small part of what is making Ninja Gaiden 2 look like a kick arse sequel. Ninja Gaiden was a fast paced game but it's got nothing on NG2. The combat is some of the most furious we've seen for a while and combines some very familiar gameplay mechanics as well as some uniquely Ninja Gaiden flavoured flourishes. Melee combat is a three-button affair (or two buttons and a trigger if you want to be technical) with numerous combos that can be learned and unlocked through upgrading the numerous weapons in the game. In an obvious nod to the Devil May Cry franchise, the player also has ranged weapons that can be used to extend combos. The player has an inexhaustible supply of shuriken but can also equip a limited number of other ranged weapons, including incendiary shuriken, arrows and bombs.

Each weapon, including ranged weapons, can be charged to deliver a more powerful attack. Each weapon has two levels of charge depending on how long the player holds down an attack button. When triggered, these charged attacks unleash devastating combos. We're not sure how the mechanic works as yet, but the way the player angles the left thumbstick somehow modifies

Spreading Jam - you're doing it wrong

It's the Violator! Where's Spawn when you need him?

Ninja Plot

We're not too sure about the plot of Ninja Gaiden 2 at the moment but we're assuming it most probably has something to do with ninjas, some demonic entities and Hayabusa looking cool. What we do know is that this time around non-human enemies will play a larger part in the game, with around 50% of the enemies being demonic in nature.

Impractical spiky staff

the attack being delivered, allowing for much longer combos than the simple canned three or four button combos. Each of the weapons in the game has its own set of unique combos and can be upgraded using yellow essence picked up from downed enemies. These essences can also be used to shorten the time it takes to charge an attack – essences left on the battlefield can be consumed to reduce the amount of time it takes to charge. So far we've seen the Scythe, Lunar Staff, Tonfa and Claws in action and we have to say that we're impressed by the combination of style and nastiness on display. The Lunar Staff, a long staff with spiked metal balls on either end and the Tonfa, a standard side-arm baton embellished with a spiked head, are especially nasty, relying on blunt force trauma to remove limbs and heads.

In addition to standard weapon attacks, the player will have access to a range of Ninpo ninja magic, ranging from the ability to set all the enemies in the surrounding area on fire to an impressive ability we saw called something along the lines of Dagger Tornado that filled the area with a maelstrom of blades, cutting nearby enemies into kibble.

FLIPPING OUT AND KILLING PEOPLE

Violence doesn't seem to be that much of a bugbear anymore when it comes to videogame controversy, but it's still something that Ninja Gaiden 2 has in spades. Dismemberments and decapitations are the order of the day. Every one of the weapons is capable of eviscerating a body and sending geysers of the red stuff (or green stuff) spurting towards the heavens. In a move that is bound to court a little more controversy that the simple, almost comic-book-like brutality of the combat is the fact that removing an enemy's limbs (and even an enemy's head in the case of many of the demons) does not necessarily kill them. Instead, the enemy will often keep attacking, or trying to attack, the player,

> Every one of the weapons is capable of eviscerating a body and sending up geysers of the red stuff

even going so far as to turn themselves into suicide bombers after grabbing hold of the main character. It should also be noted that this time around, enemies are a lot more tenacious than ever before. Players can no longer simply run away and wait for enemies to disappear as they could in the original game (and the remakes) – no, enemies will now follow the player until they are killed.

Stay tuned – next month we'll be getting our hands on the game!

Demon mooning - a terrible scourge

Check out my Wolverine cosplay!

The Bourne Conspiracy

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

Category: **Action** • Players: **1**
Developer: **High Moon Studios** • Due: **2008**

Before the Bourne movies, few people would have looked at Matt Damon and though he could be a cold hearted badarse. How wrong we were. The popularity of the five Ludlum novels has so far spawned three films, with a fourth just announced and now, finally, a game. The Bourne Conspiracy takes place both during and prior to the first Bourne adventure, The Bourne Identity, detailing the events leading up to Bourne losing his memory and "malfunctioning", as well as around 60% of the content of the first film, giving players a chance to experience Bourne as both a man on the run and as a fully functioning 30 million dollar weapon.

Developed by High Moon Entertainment, the development studio responsible for Darkwatch, and therefore, Hyper's favourite weapon, the shotgun-battleaxe, The Bourne Conspiracy combines hand-to-hand combat, shooting, driving and escaping into a very fast paced whole.

THE BOURNE PUNCH-UP

The combat engine is pretty simple but looks great, with light and heavy attacks that can be comboed together and kicks that can be triggered by holding down the heavy or light attack buttons. During combat, Bourne charges up an energy bar through successive hits. Once certain thresholds are met, Bourne can then execute a one button takedown move, either utilising a combination of attacks or the environment, smashing the opponent into walls, through windows and the like. It all looks very spectacular, not to mention brutal and very much in keeping with the Bourne movies. The more energy Bourne has, the more enemies he can take down with a single takedown move, so, if surrounded, Bourne can trigger a takedown move and eliminate a number of enemies through a sequence of button matching. Aside from basic grunts, The Bourne Conspiracy also features boss battles against deadly terrorists, assassins and other international nasties. These bosses can't simply be taken down with a single takedown move but instead must be softened up before a quick-time event (similar in concept to the boss battle in God of War) allows Bourne to kill or disable them.

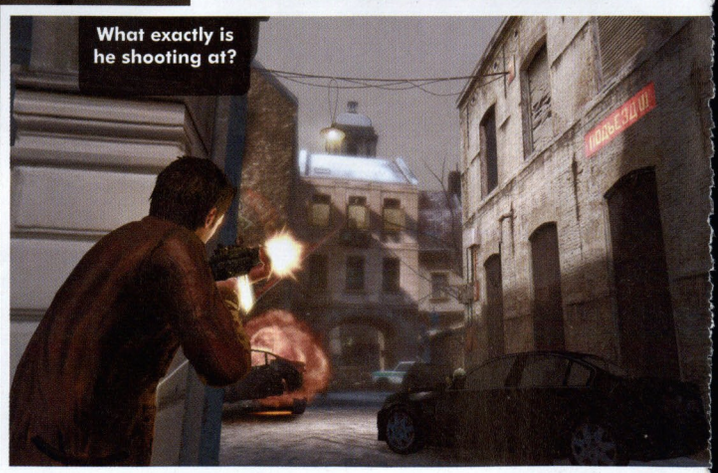
> The combat engine is pretty simple but looks great

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Jason Bourne wielding a shotgun-battleaxe!

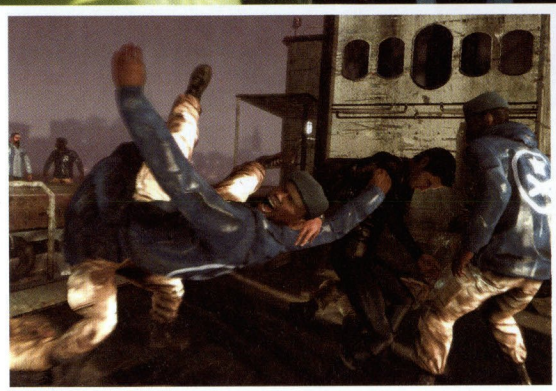
The shooting engine is equally approachable; featuring both run-and-gun action as well as stop-and-pop cover based shooting. The controls feel solid with a good balance between precise aiming

Sometimes body odour is the most dangerous weapon



Crow Peck!

NIce use of cover there Bourne



Not Pictured: Sarah Silverman

and console leniency. Much like hand-to-hand combat, the shooting sections feature a takedown ability, enabling Bourne to quickly kill one of more enemies with either a simple button press or via a button matching sequence.

From what we've experienced, the driving engine is pleasantly arcade with very precise but forgiving steering and a good sense of speed. One thing we did notice that came as a bit of a disappointment in the level we played (based on the now rather famous Mini chase from Bourne Identity) was that rather than let players use skill to avoid a crash, the developers instead chose to use a quick-time event instead.

I'M F**KING MATT DAMON

Although the game does not feature the likeness of Matt Damon, there are still a number of ties to the movie franchise. For a start the script was penned with the assistance of Tony Gilroy, the script-writer for the films and Jeff Imada, the action choreographer on the films has also worked with the team to keep the action on track with the films. Aside from actual names, however, High Moon Studios have managed to actually emulate a lot of the cinematography of the Bourne films via the use of a specially built cinematography engine that gives the game the handheld look synonymous to the films. The developers have even gone so far as to strip frames out of fighting animations (a tactic used in the Bourne movies) to make the combatants blows look harder and faster.

All in all it's quite an impressive achievement but we're still a little apprehensive about the camera. The idea of emulating the shaky cam dynamics of the films is a good one, as it definitely adds to the sense of urgency of any given event but it also adds to the disorientation. We also noticed during our hands-on time with the game that during combat the camera would quite often move to the most cinematic angle at the expense of gameplay, focussing on either Bourne or his opponent and leaving the other off screen. Fighting someone you can't see isn't the easiest thing in the world.

Bourne actually looks more like Ben Affleck

THE BOURNE SHENMUE

Honestly we're also not that sure about what appears to be an over-reliance on quick-time events (High Moon prefer to refer to them as Quick-Action events) to keep the action running. The first level we had a chance to play, a basic tutorial called "Escape the Embassy" (from The Bourne Identity) saw Bourne running through embassy corridors, occasionally getting in a little dust-up with a guard or having to perform a Shenmue style button press to keep the chase moving. These Shenmue moments just didn't feel right, as all of them in the level ended in hard fails, forcing the player to go back to the last checkpoint. The time from checkpoint to event isn't that long but the idea of a simple security screen defeating Bourne just doesn't feel right to us. Another difficulty we had with this first level was that all of the "cool" moments in which Bourne performed a great takedown or nifty stunt were canned animations played at certain trigger areas as they were passed, essentially leaving the player in the back seat as the game did all of the fun stuff. We've only played three levels so hopefully this habit of switching to animations whenever Bourne does anything great is just a symptom of the tutorial level.

As negative as we may seem, The Bourne Conspiracy is shaping up to be a great looking game with a lot of fun moments to be had with one of the great modern spy fiction characters. We're just going to keep our fingers crossed that before release the camera will settle down a bit, giving the player a more user-friendly view of the levels and that there will be less of an emphasis on quick-time events, putting the cool stuff back in the hands of gamers. «

Civilization Revolution

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

Category: **Strategy** • Players: **1-4**
Developer: **Firaxis** • Due: **June 6, 2008**

Wilks: I don't know if it's just the long time Civilization fanboy in me, but I'm not entirely convinced that Civilization should be a multi-player experience. Built for consoles, Civilization Revolution allows players to wage war against one another, build up civilisations (hooray – we can spell civilisation correctly when using it in this context) and generally do Civ things in a simplified, console friendly form. The controls are rather pleasantly simple – a target marker is controlled by the right thumbstick, the left controls unit movement and the bumper buttons open up the city menus so you can build troops, change work focus, build buildings, wonders and the like. It's pretty simple and intuitive but, coming from the perspective of someone who has played Civ to death in various forms for as long as I can remember, something just doesn't sit right with me.

Wells: From the perspective of someone who found the original PC version a tad daunting I can see how Revolution will appeal. There's no denying that this is a trimmed down version of the PC giant, and old Civvers, like Daniel, will be the first to point that out. But the meat and potatoes of the concept are still there, and still go towards achieving the goal of Sid Meier's original game – build your city, rule the world, one turn at a time. It might have had to sacrifice some of the nitty-gritty building blocks in order to do it on the 360, but the original vibe seems intact, and could potentially inspire gamers to check out the game where it all began.

Wilks: I guess I can agree with that, it's just that I'm so used to being able to open sub menus to tweak taxes, scientific development, food production and the like that just having a tab that does everything for me just feels a little nothingy. The early part of Civ, where you're building up your first city and slowly building the building and units you need to start a thriving society doesn't exactly make for fast paced multi-player either. That said, there is the ability to put all turns on a timer, limiting the amount of time players have to make their moves. That could go a long way to speeding up proceedings.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More graphical indicators as to the consequences of your decisions regarding production methods and a good tutorial for new players explaining the basic tenets of Civ.

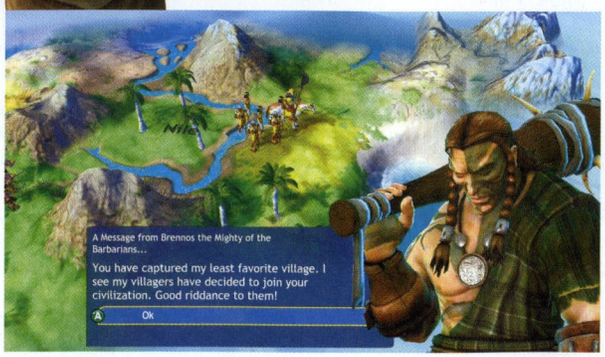
» the meat and potatoes of the concept are still there

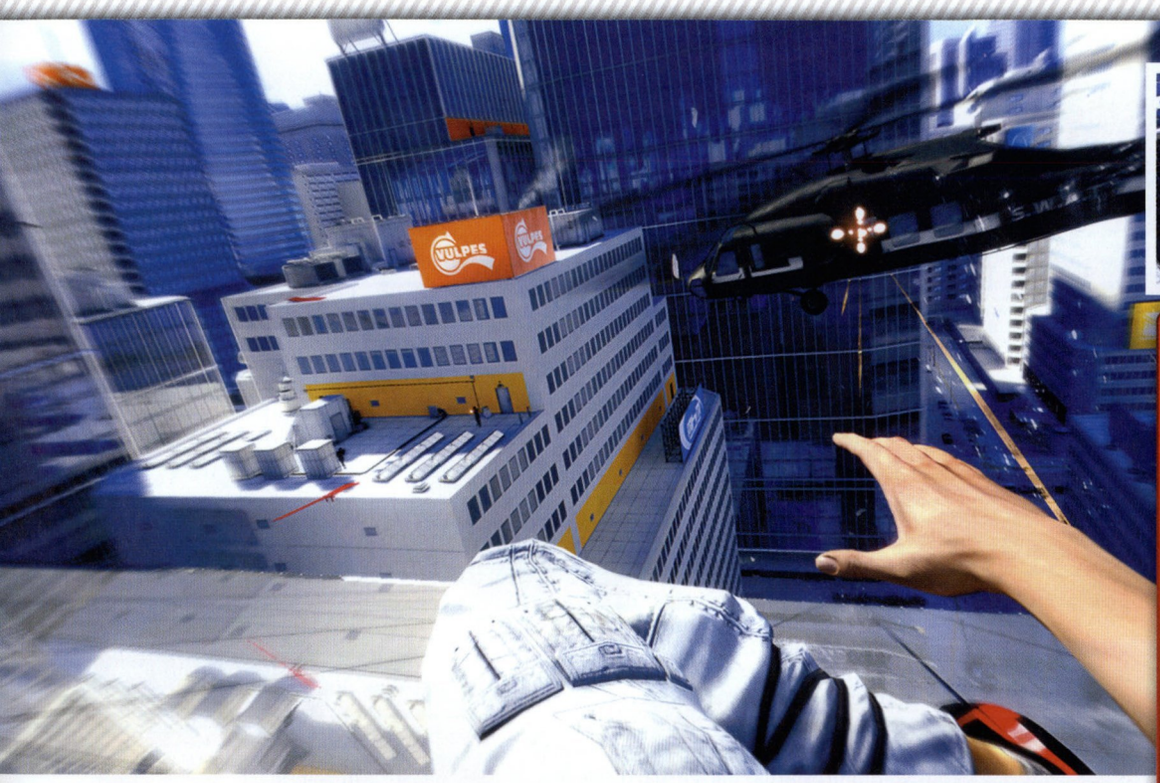
Wells: Certainly, as far as multiplayer games go, it's as sedate as they come. Timed turns do attempt to inject a sense of pace into the game, but fail to set a limit and prepare to watch that rotating cog turn as you wait and wait and wait for your buddy to finish his round. Still, this shouldn't necessarily be seen as a bad thing, as there are those of us who enjoy the strategic nature of a methodically played turn-based game – just ask those guys who play chess via snail mail. It's just a different kind of multiplayer experience, and I guess time will tell whether it thrives or dies.

Wilks: I'm personally hoping the game thrives – even though it's not my Civilization, it certainly, at this stage of development, feels solid and a hell of a lot more playable than Civilization: Play the World, the last attempt to make Civ multi-player. Of course, we only had a few hours to play the game and weren't playing against a clock so our civilisations weren't too advanced. I have the feeling that the game will definitely get more fun the more time you dedicate to it.

Wells: Agreed. It's a game where one only scratches the surface after a few hours, so we're sure it'll have a lot to offer those who can invest the time to rule the world. «

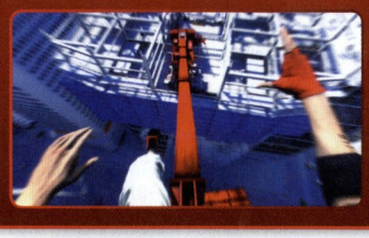
Gulliver brings some friends to Lilliput





STEADY, STEADY...

The PS3 is among the three platforms that Mirror's Edge is targeting. Since Sony's console is the only one among them with motion-sensitive controls, it's looking to offer something extra. Early buzz suggests that certain tasks, like balancing on a narrow beam, will utilise the SIXAXIS feature, requiring players to manually balance Faith as she makes her way across. It's unknown at this point what, if anything, the other platforms will do in this area, but here's hoping they don't substitute the motion-sensitive aspect with a tacked-on replacement like Quick Time Events.



Mirror's Edge

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

Category: **First Person Runner** • Players: **1-?**
Developer: **EA DICE** • Due: **TBA 2008**

You're not cool unless you use parkour in your project. That's seemingly the thinking behind some recent releases from the Hollywood and videogame camps, with Die Hard 4.0 and Casino Royale among the former, and Assassin's Creed and Free Running among the latter.

It makes sense: parkour — the freeform technique of leaping, bounding, running and swinging throughout one's environment — looks hella cool. It's right at home in a visual medium such as films and games, simply because it lets us bask in some downright awesome feats. Those who can do it properly make it look so effortless, so fluid, so appealing. Those who can't do it end up on YouTube.

If that's you, unable to leapfrog across balconies, you need not sit on the curb and pout, as EA DICE is putting forth another contender in the parkour genre. Mirror's Edge is touted by the studio as the most immersive game of its type, and with things presented entirely via a first-person perspective, it seems like a reasonable claim.

Reasonable, if not risky. Is parkour best presented this way, rather than allowing the player to see the character's body? EA DICE's General Manager Patrick Soderlund seems to think so. "We are a studio that believes in taking risks and taking games in new directions," he says. "We made the sandbox experience viable and enjoyable in Battlefield and now, we are looking to do something radical with the traditional established mechanics of first person movement."

Senior producer, Owen O'Brien, backs this up. "We want to change the way that players are able to move in first person. No more restrictions, no more being blocked by simple barriers such as walls and fences. We want to enable the player to move like a real person, with the ability to run, jump, vault and slide in a way that has never been seen before in a first person game."

Really, the city is your playground. Cast as street-born runner Faith (as in "leap of faith"... geddit?), you utilise your parkour skills to negotiate your surroundings, overcoming obstacles ranging from construction work to cops. Indeed, your character's nimble reflexes will come in handy here, as you're able to liberate them of their firearm with some lightning-fast movements. But remember that running is your strength, not weaponry. While you can use guns in Mirror's Edge, they should be considered a temporary powerup, rather than the crutch of the game. Simply put, guns aren't necessary, and in some cases — such as having an automatic rifle slung behind your back — they'll even slow you down.

Early reports suggest that movement in Mirror's Edge is very fluid, and the level design goes some way to accommodate for this. Throughout each area certain elements and structures are coloured red — a crane, a pipe, a scaffolding — which indicate the best path. You're more than welcome to forge your own course through the urban landscape, but if you're after speed and efficiency, the red way is the right way. It certainly stands out against the otherwise sterile white aesthetics (this in itself goes against the run-down dystopia grain of most games), and with various other elements coloured blue and yellow, it seems that they'll serve some other purpose as well.

Our running shoes are laced in preparation for chasing up more information. Mirror's Edge is a curious foray into not only the first-person genre, but in the action-oriented parkour sub-genre that's gained popularity of late. We're interested to see what EA DICE does, so here's hoping they don't put a foot wrong. «

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some information about the story! There had better be a good reason as to why Faith is doing all this running, and we're looking forward to finding out.

» remember that running is your strength, not weaponry

Mr McGregg, with a leg for an arm and an arm for a leg

R-Type Command

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

Category: **Strategy** • Players: **1-2** • Developer: **Irem Software Engineering** • Due: **TBA 2008**

You might be looking at that 'Category' box and scratching your head. Strategy? For an R-Type game? It's not a typo, the famous Irem shoot-'em-up series is getting a tactical makeover for its PSP iteration (it's actually called R-Type Tactics in Japan).

Instead of scrolling sideways and shooting the heck out of aliens you'll be slowly moving, well, sideways via a hexagonal-tile based battlefield and having at the aliens in a gentlemanly manner, taking turns with your pot shots. A crude analogy would be that it's Advance Wars with R9 fighters, plus around 99 other units (each with various upgrade options).

HEX GRID

The story premise is as simple as they come. The invading aliens of choice are known as the Bydo, and they sport all manner of nasty organic-looking monstrosities for you to bring down throughout the human campaign. Each mission will retain the traditional side-scrolling feel of R-Type games by having your units start at the left-hand side of a level, with your objective to the right of screen. How you manoeuvre your units and utilise them in battle is up to you, but from what we've seen some of the alien foes pack a real punch, which should make for some intense space battles.

The hexagonal movement system acts a little bit like terrain in the Advance Wars series, and different units are able to be deployed over various lengths. When you do square up against an enemy, the game changes to a 3D scene that shows your attack taking place and how much damage you've managed to inflict. Then it's back to the tactical view to try and manoeuvre some more, perhaps aim for that big pulsating eye thingy – yeah that looks like an obvious weak spot!

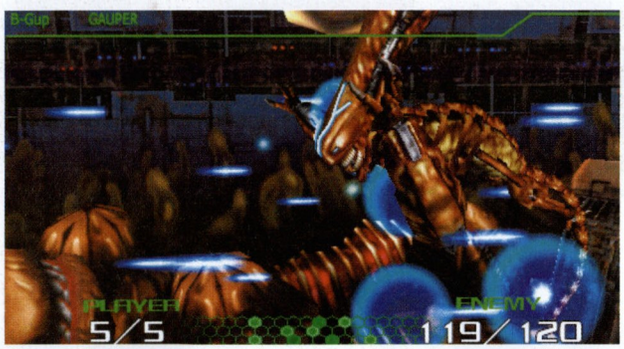
The coolest thing about R-Type Command is that once you've succeeded in your desperate mission to wipe out the Bydo, you can restart the game and join the dark side, playing as the Bydo and moving your forces inexorably towards Earth. This should placate anyone who giggles with glee when given the 'kill the bastard' option in any Bioware game. Not only that, it will effectively double the length of what is looking to be an already lengthy and deeply tactical game.

Seeing as the human story has you stranded out in Bydo space, a large focus of the game is on managing the few units that you have while trying to acquire new ones. A range of tactical options will be available, such as attaching Force units to R9 fighters to give them stronger attacks. There will also be resupply units which can capture enemy objectives.

R-Type Command will support head-to-head local multiplayer, so you can play rock-paper-scissors to see who gets to be the bad guy and battle each other during your lunch break, train trip or whatever it is two close R-Type fans like to do together. «

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Local multiplayer is all fine and dandy, but we really want to be able to battle people from around the world. Make it so, Irem.



THOSE FUNNY IREM PEOPLES

It seems that Irem like a bit of a joke. In 2000, on April Fool's day, they ostensibly sold R-Type candy, with variations including R9 (Standard Force) and RX (Tentacle Force). In 2003 they upped the ante, posting on their website that they were selling real R9 fighters, even offering a convertible model. The most elaborate hoax was in 2005, when Irem released screenshots and announced a game called R-Type Final 2, which would appear on a brand new (fake) console named EXIDNA, complete with a stealth bomber-shaped controller. For more hilarity head to *www.irem.co.jp/contents/gallery/aprilfool_05/*

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COMMAND & CONQUER: Red Alert 3

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

Category: **Real Time Strategy** • Players: **TBA** • Developer: **EA Los Angeles** • Due: **TBA 2008**

If there's one thing we lament in video games, it's the death of the live action cut scene. Others may have been happy to see this bearer of bad acting and awful blue-screen backgrounds bite the dust – but there was just something so darn cool about being 'rewarded' with a live action scene after hours of watching those little blurry sprites fight their way across the screen. Thankfully, EA Los Angeles is fully cognisant of this fact and it's with great pleasure that we can announce that Red Alert 3 will continue the series' tradition and feature more of the live action scenes we know and love... oh, there will also be a game attached.

MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM

If you're super keen to get a look at this one, the PC release of C&C 3: Kane's Wrath will include a beta testing code for the multiplayer portion of the game. By the time those console mobs get the game you'll be an online Red Alert 3 master.

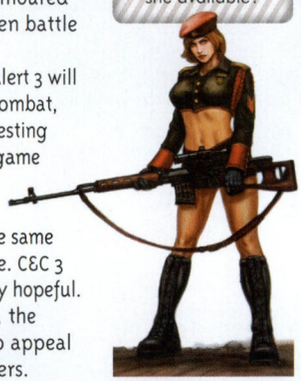
The story this time around is familiar territory: time travel trip goes wrong (the Soviets bugger up), new superpower rises, leading to World War III between the Soviets, the Allies and a new faction in the Red Alert series, the Empire of the Rising Sun. Of course, technology has also gone down a completely different path in this alternate timeline, so we can expect to see some pretty zany units and technology, such as tesla coils, armoured bears, transforming tanks and even battle dolphins. Yes, battle dolphins!

Along with the new faction, Red Alert 3 will introduce a heavier focus on naval combat, which should provide for some interesting new units and tactical options. The game will be coming to the 360 and PS3, so we're interested to see if the controller configuration can offer the same experience as a keyboard and mouse. C&C 3 felt good on the 360, so we're quietly hopeful.

Given the cross-platform focus, the game is reportedly being made to appeal to both hardcore and casual gamers. Does this mean that the gameplay will be 'dumbed down' for us inbred console hicks? Will we see big 'Press A to attack' prompts? We think not, but only time (and a decent hands-on) will tell.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some recognisable faces in the cut scenes, and for the acting to be super hammy. That hot chick from House... she available?



The most intriguing announcement about Red Alert 3 is that it will include a fully co-op campaign mode. Apparently this won't just be tacked on – you will be able to complete the entire game with a mate at your side or online. And if you're the town pariah there will be the option to have an AI character as your partner throughout the campaign (see, they do think of the little people). We don't have exact details on these AI companions, but you can safely assume that the Red Alert brand of light-hearted humour will apply.

Despite the fact that the alternate Soviet universe seems to have been done to death lately, we can't wait to give Red Alert 3 a test drive. The series has always offered fast, action-packed RTS gameplay with a sprinkling of tongue in cheek. And as we said above it's going to carry the flame for the anachronistic live action cut scene, so we're in love already. Plus... battle dolphins. «

» Red Alert 3 will introduce a heavier focus on naval combat

Zeppelins - is there anything they can't do?

I don't think this could be any more Japanese

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

You'll eventually come across characters who cannot fight alongside you but who can appear as summons via badges that you find in the game. Along with badges, your mobile phone plays a large role and, in a popular-culture-meets-gaming kind of way, the type of attacks and abilities that you can use are strongly related to the types of technological devices that young adults are using in the Shibuya district today.

The World Ends With You

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

Category: **RPG** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Jupiter** • Due: **TBA 2008**

Those crazy Japanese kiddies, getting all hip and cool and stuff. The World Ends With You is a game that mirrors the awesomely cool coolness of those cats who hang around the Shibuya district of inner Tokyo – where the best-looking, fashion-conscious, mobile-phone-using teens go to be part of the district's upmarket consumerist image. The Shibuya district has actually been recreated in-game for TWEWY, so if you're familiar with it then you should recognise quite a few of the locations.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Not a repeat of the Advance Wars: Dark Conflict translation debacle. Please give us a direct Japanese to English translation, and no stupid name changes.

TWEWYWTHIWWJP?

Also known as It's a Wonderful World in Japan, where it's been out since last year, TWEWY's artistic presentation is probably best described as an RPG version of Jet Set Radio, but instead of rollerblading around and spray painting everything in sight, you're an angst-ridden teen – Fifteen year-old Neku – who wakes up in Shibuya with a mysterious badge and the ability to read people's minds.

It's these two aspects (the badges and mind reading) that drive TWEWY's gameplay. Neku is told that he must survive for seven days in Shibuya. 'Survive' pretty much means 'battle lots of psychic monsters', which are uncovered in each area by using Neku's psychic scan ability to read people's thoughts and find out information. Citizens' negative thoughts and energy are known as the Noise, and this manifests itself into various creatures such as frogs, wolves and bears that need to be killed. This survival gauntlet is known as the Shinigami Game (the Shinigami sends you phone text missions). Each contestant has a black badge and the rules of engagement are that you cannot leave the Shibuya district.

» Neku is told that he must survive for seven days

Neku soon strikes a pact with a second participant in this game, a girl called Shiki Misaki, and there will be other characters who can accompany you throughout the game, each with their own unique powers in battle. You'll also start to come to grips with the game's badge system, which grants you new abilities and powers. With over 300 badges to collect, there should be enough variety for most people. Your defensive and offensive capabilities will be linked to what clothes you wear, which can be purchased from the many shops in the district.

Combat will take place in real time, with different touch-screen strokes resulting in various attack patterns. For example, you can quickly tap an enemy to fire projectiles, or tap and hold the stylus over a target to charge up an attack. The left and right buttons will also add modifiers to your attacks. If that's not fast-paced enough for you, each battle will take place with a partner on the top screen, and you must control both participants if you want to get the most out of each battle, not to mention preserve that shared health bar.

TWEWY comes from the minds behind the Kingdom Hearts series, with a soundtrack made up of Japanese pop and hip-hop artists. The modern day setting is certainly a very different approach for a Japanese RPG, so bring on the badge collecting, we say. «

Dragonball Z: BURST LIMIT

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

Category: **Fighting** • Players: **1-2**
Developer: **Namco Bandai** • Due: **TBA 2008**

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Naruto on the 360 managed to mix fighting with free-roaming really well. It would be nice if Burst Limit's story mode offers a strong exploration mechanic.

The title sounds a little bit like how your bladder feels the morning after a big night out, but if you're the kind of gamer that likes your action to be of the ninja-fighting-ninja-whilst-uttering-guttural-grunts kind then Dragonball Z: Burst Limit will likely be the game for you. There have been a lot of Dragonball Z games, mostly on the PS2, and if you're not familiar with them then you obviously haven't watched a ten year-old peruse the shelves at your local games shop. Okay, that was a bit low; there is still plenty to like about the anime-inspired series for us grown up gamers too.

» action of the ninja-fighting-ninja-whilst-uttering-guttural-grunts kind

In fact, over the years the Dragonball Z games have shown themselves to be quite competent fighting titles.

KAMEHAMEHUH?

We love watching spiky-haired ninjas jump around a 3D space as much as the next guy, but we would also like to see something a bit different this time around, particularly as the Dragonball Z series straps on its boots and enters the next-gen arena. So far, from what we've managed to dig up on Burst Limit, the game's roots are being firmly planted in the soil of frenetic one-on-one fighting action, but along with this traditional approach there are a couple of interesting design choices.

The first of these relates to how special moves are carried out in the game. The fighting itself takes place on a pseudo 3D level (2D presentation but you can sidestep to avoid fireball attacks and the like). However, whenever one of the characters initiates a special attack like, say, an energy beam, the game's perspective will seamlessly switch to a cell-shaded close up of that attack being charged. It will then switch back to normal gameplay as the attack takes place. This artistic approach is certainly in line with the game's Anime roots, and might even make watching Burst Limit a lot more fun than playing it. Of course, it could also get in the way of playing the game as the action is constantly paused for the umpteenth time. We'll have to wait and see.

A fighting game wouldn't be complete without the ability to knock your opponent into other areas of each stage – so it's good to see that this element will be included in Burst Limit. Thirteen stages have been announced at this, uh, stage, as well as 35 playable characters – which is a pretty awesome roster for a fighting game. The focus seems to be on giving you a lot of characters to experiment with, and we're guessing that they'll be instantly recognisable if you're a fan of the Dragonball Z manga or anime.

Being a 360/PS3 game, you can expect a lot of graphical wizardry during fights and special attacks. Hopefully this will also mean more detailed scenery in each stage, although the backgrounds for the locations that we've seen so far look fairly bland (yay, there are some trees and.... more trees). That said, knocking your opponent into the air and battling it out in the stratosphere never really gets old.

Dragonball Z: Burst Limit is looking pretty solid, and should be a real multiplayer blast over Xbox Live and the PS Network. If only we had some friends to play with. «

Battle of the Bands

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

Category: **Rhythm** • Players: **1-2**
Developer: **Planet Moon** • Due: **April**

As soon as we heard that the game formerly known as Band Mashups was now going to be called Battle of the Bands, all we could think was Bill & Ted. Rather disappointingly, there does not appear to be any band named Wyld Stallyns in the credits and God Gave Rock & Roll to You does not appear to be in the list of available tracks. A gross oversight in our opinion. For those of you not familiar with the game, Battle of the Bands is a Wii rhythm combat game that sees players facing off playing the same track against each other to build up combo points to trigger weapons that damage the opponent's score and steer the song towards the player's chosen musical style. The concept is very silly, but after getting our hands on some code, we can also say that it's quite a bit of fun as well.

The controls are remarkably simple for a rhythm game, with the players using the Wiimote somewhat like a conductor's baton, flicking it left, right or forward depending on note placement, shaking it side to side when a wiggly line appears and stabbing forward to trigger song specific attacks. The real challenge in the game comes with the switching of musical styles. At the beginning of a game, the two players (or the player and the AI) choose a musical style for their band, ranging from hard rock through to country and even Mariachi. Depending on who is doing better during the game, the musical style of the track changes to that of the dominant band, changing the overall tempo of the song. It's quite a silly concept, but once you've head a Mariachi version of Insane in the Membrane you'll be sold on it as hard as us.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Wyld Stallyns as a playable band. Failing that, a return to the name Band Mashups.

NOBODY CAN STOP THE MUSIC

Aside from hitting notes and launching attacks, the players also has to defend themselves from their opponent's musical weapons by hitting the B trigger just before the attack hits. In addition to the normal attacks chosen at the beginning of each round and triggered by successful note combos, each song also feature one or more "solo" moments in which one player takes a turn to carry out a string of attacks and the other player defends before switching things up and giving the defender a chance to attack.

We didn't have a chance to get our hands on the single player component of the game but, in all honesty, we can't see it having particularly much appeal. Battle of the Bands is a multi-player game pure and simple. The controls are simple enough for a novice player to come in and learn within a game or two. With a couple of mates around and a few beers under the belt we imagine that Battle of the Bands will be an absolute hoot. We'll let you know more when we get review code in the next month or so.

De Blob

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

Category: **Puzzle/Action** • Players: **1-4**
Developer: **Blue Tongue** • Due: **2008**

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Special colours and patterns – we know they're in the game but we haven't seen them as yet.

It's like a Sid and Marty Krofft nightmare

You may remember that last time we took a look at the Australian developed Wii game we weren't that impressed, figuring it a very simplistic game with little in the way of varying gameplay and a very finite life-span. Well, we're pleased to announce that our opinion has changed for the better. We recently had a chance to get some hands on time with a much more complete version of the game and we're pleased to announce that not only is the game now actually playing like a real game, it's turning out to be a hell of a lot of fun as well.

For those of you not familiar with De Blob, here's a little recap – set in Chroma City, a once beautiful, multi-coloured paradise now rendered monochrome by the evil Inkies, players, taking the role of an amorphous, slightly humanoid blob capable of picking up and transmitting colour, must repaint the city and free the citizens from the horrors of a black and white existence. Taking its cue from a student project in the Netherlands, players must guide the blob through Chroma city picking up colours and using them to paint building, as well as completing time limited challenges to unlock the next area of the city to paint.

It's these timed challenges that have really taken what was a simple and rather dull game and made it into something very enjoyable. The challenges all seem to revolve around painting some buildings a certain colour in a short span of time but the obstacles thrown in the player's way keep the painting challenges fresh. During our hands on time with the game some of the challenges we faced included painting a row of buildings brown. The entire line of building had to be painted without touching the ground (due to puddles of black ink). Another time we had to paint a long row of buildings having to dodge numerous water-sprays capable of removing the blob's colour, forcing him to go back to the beginning to get some new hue.

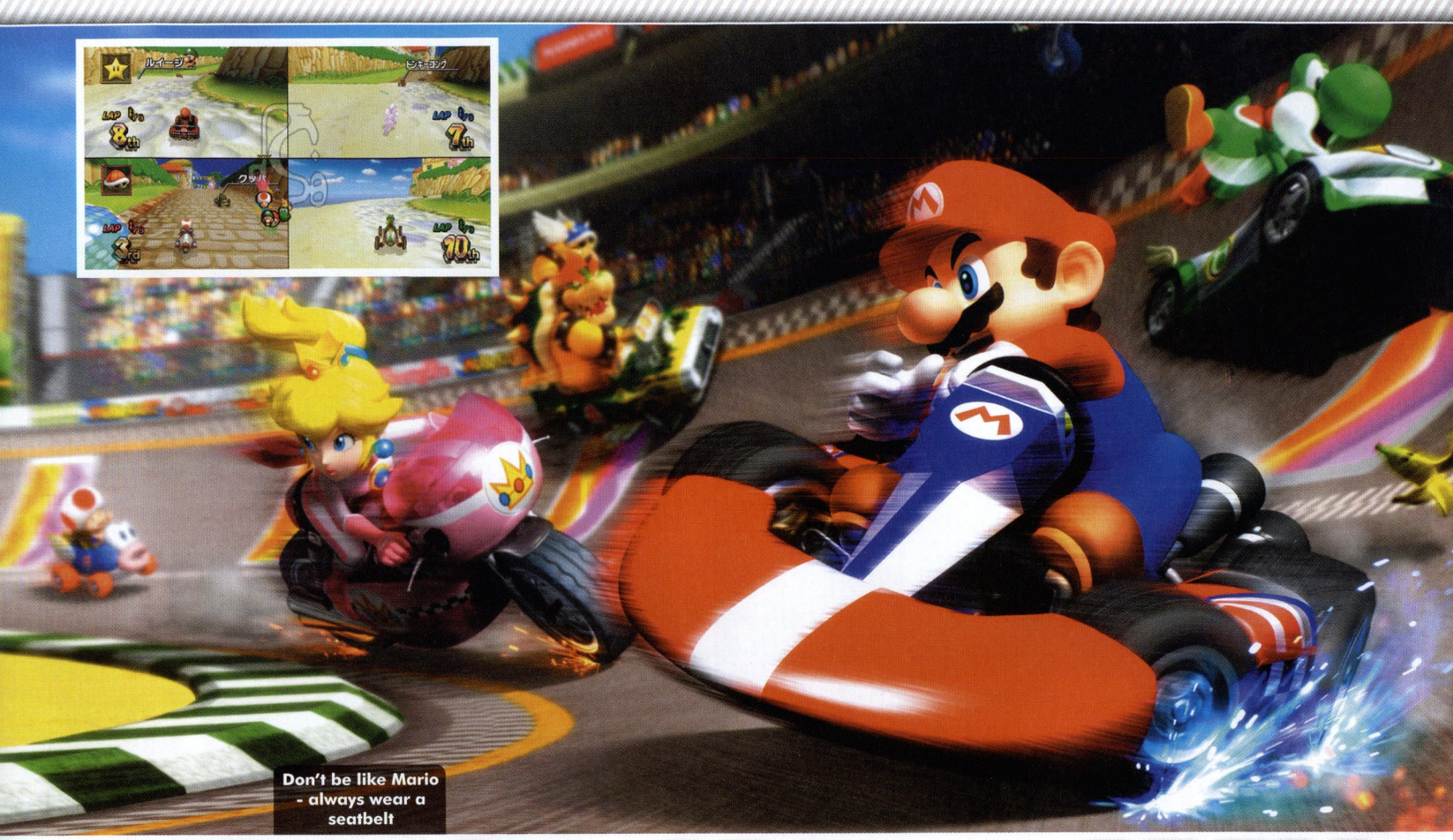
BRING THE NOISE

The music has also come a long way since we last looked at the game. Last time the music simply built on a linear progression as more colour was added to Chroma City. Now the music takes a far more synaesthetic approach, with each primary and secondary colour having a key instrumental sound overlaying the base soundtrack for the level. Each of the base tracks is somewhere around four minutes long but cut into smaller section that can be re-sequenced to prevent too much repetition. Depending on what is happening in the level the style of the music cam morph into a more upbeat or downbeat version of the track. With the colour sound overlays it becomes quite an impressive aural experience. To keep a uniform sound scape, all of the effects noises, such as completing an objective or stomping an Inkie are pitched to be in key with whatever track is playing in the background. Most effects are also keyed to trigger on either next beat or next bar so they keep in tempo with the music as well.

We may have been negative the first time we saw De Blob but our opinion of the game has definitely taken a turn for the better. It's shaping up to be both a well-polished and fun little game. We should have a review for you within the next few months. «

» shaping up to be both a well-polished and fun little game

Definitely time for Depends



Don't be like Mario - always wear a seatbelt

Mario Kart Wii

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

Category: **Racing** • Players: **1-12**
Developer: **Nintendo** • Due: **April 27**

We loves us some Mario Kart here in the Hyper bunker. Many a day has been spent procrastinating whilst playing Mario Kart DS, leading to some remarkably tight and unpleasant deadlines so it has been with baited breath that we've awaited the arrival of playable Mario kart Wii code. And play it we did, spending a very pleasant afternoon speeding around tracks both familiar and new in all manner of buggies and, new to the franchise, bikes. So is it any good? It's Mario kart – did you even need to ask?

Naturally the biggest new element in Mario Kart Wii is the inclusion of motion controls and the nifty looking wheel that the game comes with. In all honesty, if you're a fan of Mario Kart then you probably won't want to use the motion controls, as they make the handling of the cars feel rather sluggish and inaccurate, especially when you're trying to power-slide around a tight corner. On the plus side, when a player goes over a jump using the motion controls they can shale the Wiimote to perform a stunt, giving them a temporary speed boost.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Waluigi getting his own game – it's about time after all.

BRING BACK THE WAVEBIRD!

Thankfully players aren't forced to use the motion controls as the game supports a range of control styles, ranging from Wiimote and Nunchuck, with the Wiimote being used to accelerate and brake and the Nunchuck thumbstick being used to steer to the Classic Controller. The Gamecube controller will also be supported in the final version if you've been itching to get one of the best peripherals ever made out of retirement.

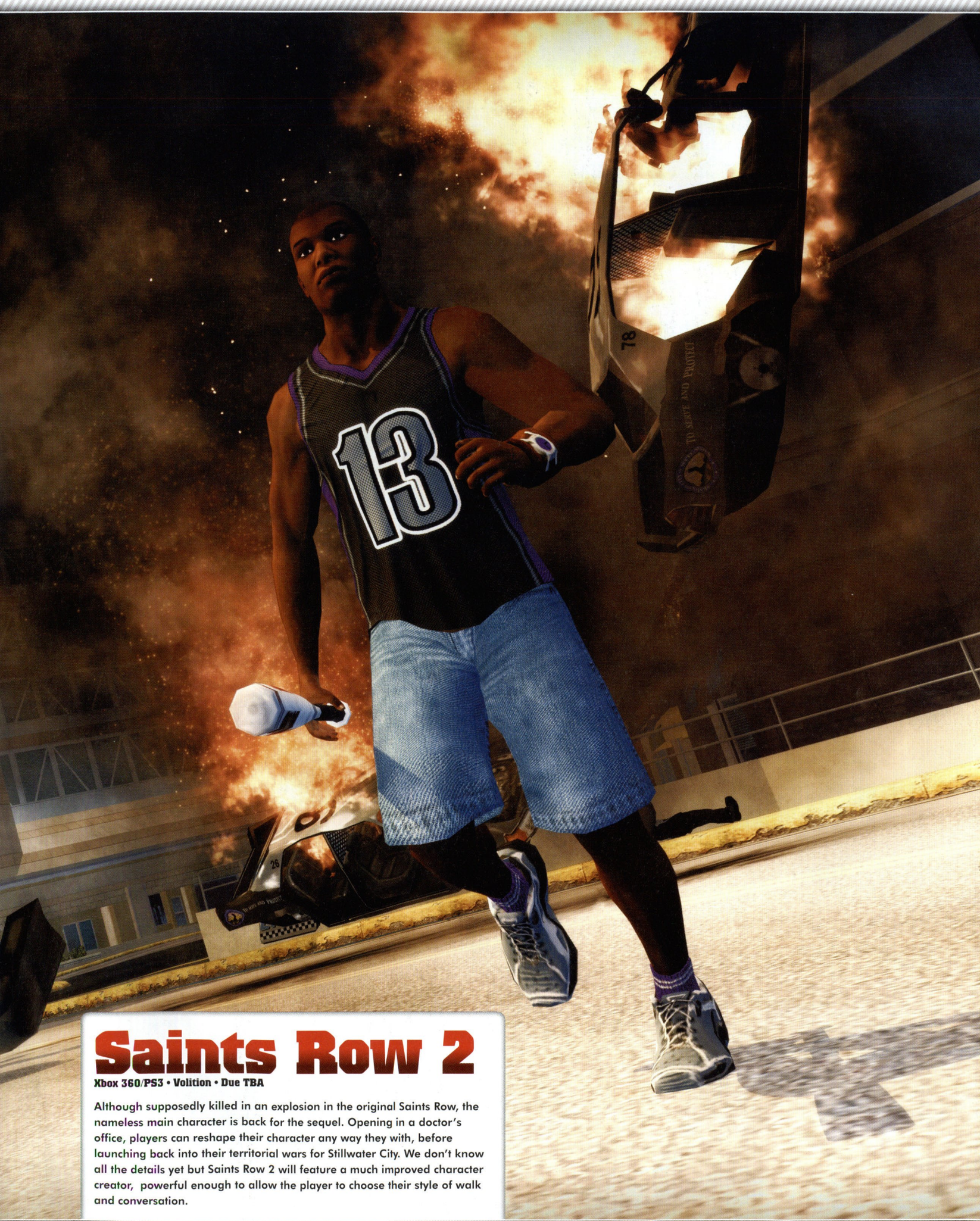
The other new addition to the Mario Kart franchise is the inclusion of bikes in races. The bikes handle quite differently to karts, as they are not able to fully slide around corners. Instead, bikes have the ability to pop a wheelie (that's the technical term) to gain a speed boost on the straight. In our time with the game we found the bikes to be more challenging to ride than the karts but that could most probably be put down to our experience with the latter and ignorance of the former. Regardless of the vehicle type, races are still divided into 50, 100 and 150cc events depending on the speed you wish to race. As always, the 50cc races feel horribly slow for someone who has played a Mario Kart game before, but the 150cc is as fat as ever.

Mario Kart Wii will ship with 12 characters and 16 maps, ranging from old

classics like Mario Raceway from the N64 and Yoshi Falls from the sublime Mario Kart DS to new tracks with names like Moo Moo Meadows and Toad's Factory, each of which can support up to 12 players in multi-player. We haven't experienced the chaos of a full multi-player game as yet but we can't wait.

Surprisingly, Mario Kart Wii isn't the most stunning game around, featuring some rather simple design and texturing for the Mario Kart franchise but from what we've seen, the single player game runs at a rock solid framerate as a result. «

KUSTICS



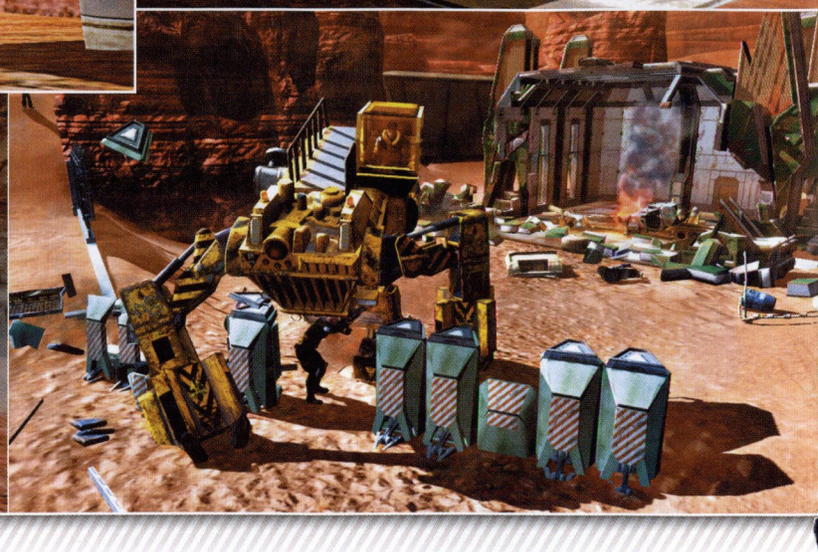
Saints Row 2

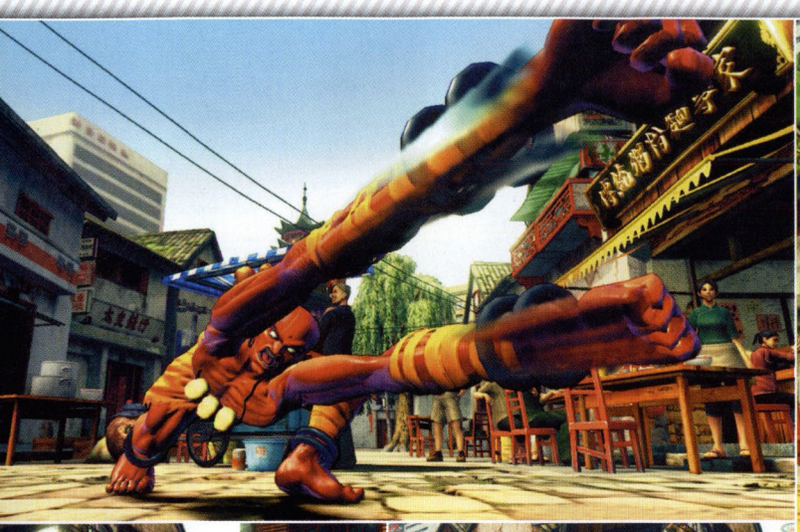
Xbox 360/PS3 • Volition • Due TBA

Although supposedly killed in an explosion in the original Saints Row, the nameless main character is back for the sequel. Opening in a doctor's office, players can reshape their character any way they with, before launching back into their territorial wars for Stillwater City. We don't know all the details yet but Saints Row 2 will feature a much improved character creator, powerful enough to allow the player to choose their style of walk and conversation.

Red Faction 3

Xbox 360/PS3/PC • Volition • Due TBA





Street Fighter IV

Xbox 360/PS3 • Capcom • Due TBA

Hearing Colours, Seeing Sounds

» Darren Wells

A LOOK/LISTEN AT SYNESTHESIA IN VIDEOGAMES

We've all heard the metaphors. "Mondays make me blue". "I'm too yellow to fight". "She's gone red with rage." But have you heard the one about the number three inducing a taste of watermelon? Or the one where square-shaped objects will create a prickly sensation in your left elbow? They're not snippets of teen vernacular or lines ripped from Tarantino off-cuts, but symptoms of a condition known as synesthesia, the signals of one sense being partly interpreted by another.

Far from being a form of classical conditioning, where a stimulus is paired with a reaction by association, synesthesia is neurologically based. It's involuntary. It can't be learned, nor can it be unlearned. To those who have it, it's as normal as everyday seeing or listening. A common form, for instance, sees those with synesthesia perceiving letters or numbers with distinct colours, despite their actual printed appearance. Thus, it makes sense to learn that the word synesthesia comes from the Greek "syn" (together) and "aesthesis" (perception) to literally mean, "joined perception."

Whether it's common or rare is undetermined. Current estimates range from synesthesia affecting one person in 25, to 1 in 200, to 1 in 100,000. It's a hard statistic to pin down. But ever since videogames hit the scene, the sensations of synesthesia have been made available to anyone who boots up. A number of developers, both professional and independent, have produced titles that make visuals and audio inseparable, where the presence of one is vital to the other.

FEEL THE MUSIC

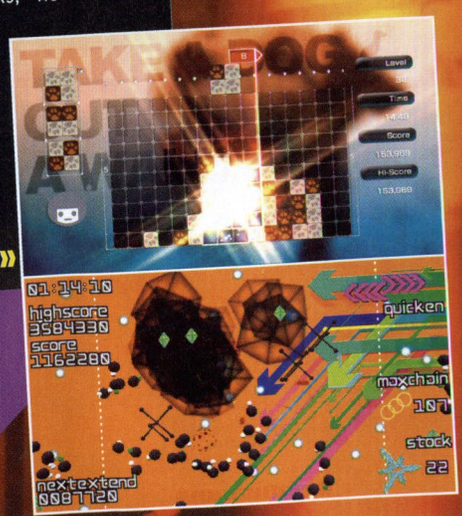
It all starts with a simple beat. Whether it comes from a thumping nightclub or your iPod's headphones, that rhythmic audio inevitably finds it way into your head, going from pinna to eardrum to cochlea to grey mushy stuff in a fraction of a millisecond.

That should be the end of it, but it's not. That music, that infectious beat, has a habit of making one move with the tune. Finger drums, foot taps, head nods. The invisible music manifests itself into a physical – and visible – representation. It's a basic interpretation, but a universal one.

Perhaps that's why the man who practically invented videogame synesthesia is careful to downplay his achievements. "The methodology is not anything that is special to just my projects," says famed game designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi. "If you think about how or why a DJ plays non-stop for hours without getting bored, or why an artist performing with an instrument comes alive as they play to the music, the answer is probably hidden in that formula."

Mizuguchi has made a rather convincing formula of his own. First coming to prominence with his digital shoot 'em up Rez (2002) – which pairs gameplay with an audio scheme that builds in proportion to the player's progress – he went on to incorporate a visual/music/gameplay relationship in each of his subsequent titles. Lumines (2004) teaches the player to rely on musical rhythm in order to delete matching coloured bocks, while Every Extend Extra (2006) adds musical elements that seem to be the aural equivalents of the coloured mayhem happening on screen.

"Creating and providing stimulation through the use of visuals and sound in games has always been the core of my projects," he explains. "Although the sound component may stand out more, I believe that it is also balanced out by – and is as important as – the other gameplay elements: visuals, vibration, story, et cetera. The sound/music generally plays the role of setting the pace of the game through its rhythm »



Mizuguchi's Lumines and E4

» "CREATING AND PROVIDING STIMULATION THROUGH THE USE OF VISUALS AND SOUND IN GAMES HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE CORE OF MY PROJECTS"

Live Audio

Thank the intertron lords for their many bytes, because they've made Tetsuya Mizuguchi's previous works – some of which were becoming rare collectables – available to the masses via Xbox Live Arcade. Rez HD, Lumines Live!, and Every Extend Extra Extreme have all been adapted from their original incarnations into faithful remakes.

They've got Mizuguchi's thumbs up, who says they've gone further than what he was able to do at the time. "I would like to believe that the XBLA versions of these games have achieved and gone beyond the goals of the originals, mainly due to the fact that they are now presented in HD and in digital surround sound," he says. "With the older platforms, we faced challenges that we could not overcome no matter what we tried, but the current environment – the Xbox 360 – makes them possible."

We're quite big fans of The Miz's XBLA library. Each game only costs a handful of points and require the scantest sliver of your download quota to store. A small price to pay for some games that will hook you in for hours.

Hearing

» while you control your character (Rez), blocks (Lumines), or craft (Every Extend Extra). It is also integrated in a way that the player receives a sound response to an action/command they enter (a call and response design) and lets the player feel the sound/music not only with the ears but also with the eyes and the body."

His unique incorporation of sound is one that he's determined to stick with. "Having studied media aesthetics in school, [synesthesia] was a natural discovery for me and I was immediately intrigued by it. Trying to apply that in the form of a game is the challenging part, but creating a multi-sensory experience has been, and will continue to be, one of my goals."

SEE THE SOUND

It's also the goal of other game designers. Dylan Fitterer, creator of Audiosurf, takes up the challenge in another way: his game dynamically generates a level from a musical track supplied by the player. Each drum beat, guitar twang and cowbell thwack goes towards shaping the rollercoaster-like course of the game, as well as determining the placement of the coloured gems required to score points.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Fitterer cites the perennial Rez as his inspiration. "Rez set me on the path of combining gameplay and music," he says, "but I wanted to create a different experience and use my own music with it." The result is a game that literally turns the aural into the visual.

From there, the game is out of Fitterer's hands and into those of the player. With Audiosurf supporting any song – heck, any audio file; try putting in your uni lectures – the experience is dependent on what the player decides to make of it, not what the developer dictates it should be. In other words, there's less authorial intent. "That's a good thing," says Fitterer. "In Audiosurf, the more I lose control of the gameplay the more the player gains control of it. Players can choose their own experience and feel ownership of the result."

Audiosurf generates levels based on music input

From a gameplay perspective, that result is arguably more simplistic than most. The glut of modern titles require the use of several skills taught to the player in order to solve many problems. Games like Audiosurf teach one to solve one. There may be various gameplay strategies that run parallel to this, but they never take the focus off the central concept. No surprise to find that it's Mizuguchi's mantra, with the designer saying that "for the games I've worked on, the main goal has been to create a multi-sensory experience while keeping the basics of the gameplay rather simple."

» "I DO THINK THAT WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY FROM THE DAYS OF BLEEPS AND BLOOPS" SAYS MIZUGUCHI

That mantra is also upheld by Jonathan Mak, creator of the PlayStation 3 shoot 'em up Everyday Shooter, which he describes as "an attempt at beauty through simplicity." Like Mizuguchi's desire to present visual representations of audio, with that result producing an emotional response, Mak's gameplay also interweaves the power of sound, albeit in a simpler way. "In the background, there is a single guitar track that plays throughout the entire level. On top of that, a guitar riff or note is played every time the player shoots something. That's it!"

But Mak describes the inherent upside. "A cousin of simplicity is organic-ness or naturalness. Sounds occurring as a direct result to interaction, and nothing more, gives a naturalness to the soundscape because you can't hear any evidence of a mechanical tampering of sounds. In other words, the player is never made aware that there is some behind-the-scenes trickery going on; it just all falls out naturally from the gameplay rules."

Fitterer observes that Audiosurf follows a similar route, in that it produces its unique results naturally, without any obtuse input from the player or concrete decree from the developer. "Players are really enjoying the ability to set the mood and pace of their own game experience," he says. "Using music gives them the ability to set a huge number of parameters with very little effort. If you know the song you know about what the Audiosurf track will look like." He notes it was that very aspect that played havoc during development; familiarly hardly represents a challenge, after all. Thus, work not only had to be done to ensure songs known to the player wouldn't be a cakewalk, but that fast-paced tracks didn't present a nightmare experience.

"Scaling the difficulty took a lot of work to get right," Fitterer reveals. "It's a delicate balance because a fully visualised song calls for more blocks than most new users can handle. It's tricky to scale back at the right places to give new players a less challenging experience while keeping it a strong music visualiser."

ENEMY, THY NAME IS RHYTHM

It's those last two words – music visualiser – that are the crux of a synesthetic game.

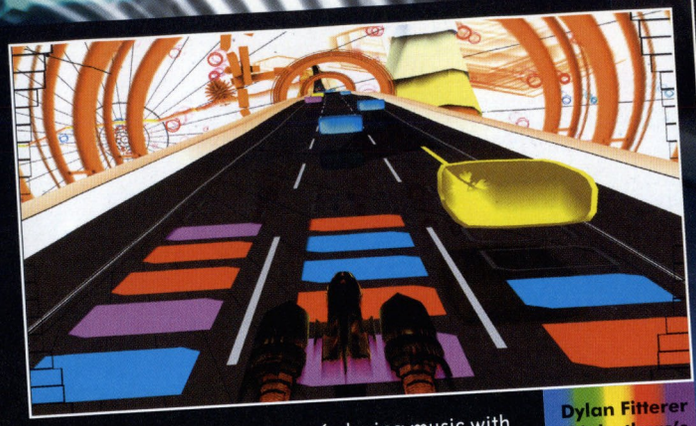
Audiosurf is a graphical representation of audio, Everyday Shooter weaves the sound of the player into the sound of the music, and Mizuguchi's stable explores new possibilities with each release. Clearly, in an era where new hardware sees a new graphics arms race, developers are recognising the power of interactive sound.

"I do think that we have come a long way from the days of bleeps and bloops, and that sound plays an integral part in today's games," says Mizuguchi. "It's no longer an element that is just there as background music or just to add fun – it's an element that immerses players into the games. Today's technology allows for very high-quality sounds in games and implementing original/licensed music has become a standard. Also, with the recent success of music and rhythm-based games, using sound as a function controlled by the player has also become somewhat of a standard, although there is always a room for improvement."

He's got a point. One need look no further than the likes of Guitar Hero and Dance Dance Revolution to see how the rhythm-based music game has exploded over the years. By assigning buttons to notes, then requiring the player to

press those buttons at the right time, rhythm games explore the fringes of synesthesia by turning a normally invisible media – sound – into not only something that one can see, but into something that they can interact with in a tactile way. And although the concept is a distant cousin to the likes of Mizuguchi and the lads, it's often the closest mainstream gaming will get to it, not to mention being the most ubiquitous interpretation.

But Mizuguchi's not the only one demanding improvement. "I generally am not a big fan of these games because they make the music the enemy," says Mak. "If you do not follow the music exactly, you lose. But music isn't about the rote playback of a series of notes, it's about playing with those notes and putting your own expression on it. I always wish that they'd come up with a rhythm game where you get to play WITH the rhythm, instead of against it." However, in the same breath, Mak acknowledges the strengths of such music titles, praising them for what they do achieve. "Guitar Hero and Rock Band aren't about gameplay in the traditional sense. They're about giving the player a sense of ownership over the rock music output so that it feels like [the player is] playing the music. And it's also largely about the social aspect of playing music with other people. In that sense, the music brings the people together. Isn't that a funny sort of contradiction given the 'music-as-enemy' angle?"



Dylan Fitterer thinks there's still more to do with Audiosurf

THE OBSTACLE FACTOR

Technically, one could say that's true of the lion's share of current synesthesia games. Sure, they bring a normally invisible medium to the visual front, but they still employ music as a gameplay mechanic that the player must negotiate and harness. In Mizuguchi's Lumines, for example, the player is at the mercy of "the line", that nefarious vertical sliver that sweeps across the board to »

What Next?

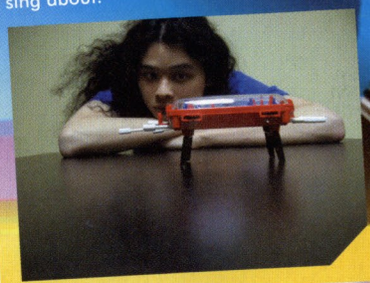
While lending the ears of our interview subjects, we couldn't help but ask what their plans were for the future. What wild and exciting projects were they working on? What zany ideas did they have? As is the case with most gestating concepts, cards were kept pretty close to chests.

Jonathan Mak has something in the pipeline, but what that something is remains elusive for now. "I don't really like talking about future projects until there's something to show, but for now I'll just say it's a collaboration with a local musician here in Toronto."

Dylan Fitterer's primary focus is on refining Audiosurf via Valve's Steam platform. "There's still so much I'd like to add," he says. "Expanding the community features is a top priority. For example, each scoreboard should have a comments section so you can find out who the other weirdos are who like the music you like."

Tetsuya Mizuguchi, bless him, zips his lips and offers naught but a tease. "While I cannot comment on our current and future projects, we hope to bring quality titles that offer a rich, entertaining experience to the gamers."

Alas, it seems there's precious little information to go on. Still, when one of these names does announce a new title, chances are it'll be something to sing about.



delete completed blocks with each pass. The line's movement speed is entirely dependent on the music, and depending on the play style of the individual, fast songs might be preferred to accumulate points rapid-fire style, or slow songs might be favoured in order to string together block combos. Whatever the approach, it all comes down to relying on — or working against — the music.

Same goes for Fitterer's Audiosurf. The music chosen by the player is transformed into a racetrack that only ends when the song does. There's no chance for respite, no way to stop and just take in the psychedelic scenery. During the helter-skelter journey from A to B, the player must constantly avoid null-scoring white blocks, while at the same time collecting the right colour for their current array of blocks, with the placement of each decided by the choice of song.

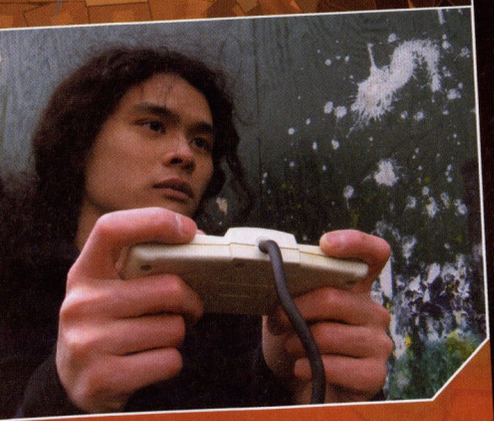
As with Lumines (but perhaps even moreso), it's all about dealing with the hurdles of the audio, which Fitterer says is the game's genesis. "One of the core ideas in Audiosurf is speeding downhill when music is intense and climbing uphill when music is calm," he says. "That's how Audiosurf creates the side-view 'rollercoaster' that shows the shape of any song." Thus, it could be said that along with presenting the music in a visual way, the game presents that visualised music as an obstacle that must be overcome. (Incidentally, Fitterer's favoured tunes are ones that mix things up: "I really enjoy songs with lots of contrast — songs with both very loud and very quiet parts. That kind of song is shaped with many hills to climb and sail down the other side.")

Riff: Everyday Shooter and Mak

Mizuguchi seems to be aware of the obstacle factor. Heck, anyone who's heard looped game menu music, or Britney Spears remixes on endless playback, knows that audio can turn from favourable to frustrating in an instant. Hence, he reveals that conscious thought drives his use and implementation of sound.

"The sound effects are designed in a way that will make the player feel good, while the music is carefully selected to encourage the player's emotions and feelings go on a ride of its own, like an emotional drive," he says. "Since the effect one gets from sound is a chemical reaction that combines both the physical and emotional aspects, we take this approach in which we carefully place the sound that will be most effective to a player. Some other keywords that apply to one's mind and body condition and may help better understand this approach are 'call and response' and 'active and passive.'"

How apt it is that "call and response" not only refers to an exchange between stimuli and reaction, but also a musical composition technique where two phrases are played by two musicians, the second complimenting the first. Mizuguchi seems to live and breathe treble clefts.



» THE WAY I USE SOUND AND MUSIC IN GAMES IS DIFFERENT THAN YOUR ORDINARY ACTION/ADVENTURE

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Still, that's not to say he's in it just to flex his own musical muscles. While Mizuguchi thrives on the power of good game audio, he says there's got to be something in it for the player, or it all amounts to nothing. "[Music] must have some kind of meaning to everyone involved, both the gamer and the designer," he says. "It's the driving tool that allows for a much richer experience of the world/environment and the message that is built in the game."

For Mak's Everyday Shooter, the same rule applies: there must be meaning to the sound for both the player and the programmer. "All soundscapes are governed by natural rules," he explains. "When you step out onto the street, what you hear is not random. You hear the soft swooshing of cars sprinkled with the occasional snarl of a souped up Civic or whatever. Depending on where you live, you might hear the chatter of pedestrians, honking of horns, et cetera. But it's not random. You won't suddenly hear a cow moo-ing or an announcer yelling 'HE SHOOTS, HE SCORES!' It's not random, because it's governed by the rules of traffic.

"Same goes for the game. Certain sounds are played only when certain enemies are destroyed. And if you chain them, other sounds may play. Also, there is a limited number of these enemies, and they spawn in various formations. All these things form the rules for the soundscape, almost like sheet music. So it is actually the level rules that comprises the final musical score of the soundscape."

But no matter how it's composed, having the audio placed at the forefront of a game, as it is with Everyday Shooter, might be a little off-putting to the casual gamer. And having a game that incorporates it in a synesthetic way is likely to bewilder them further. Remember: most games utilise audio in a traditional "background score" kind of way. It doesn't intrude, it doesn't call attention to itself. It stays behind the scenes, complimenting the on-screen action rather than becoming a part of it. Mizuguchi's works are among the growing number of departures to this approach, but to echo his earlier comments, he's not claiming ownership of it. "It does seem like it has become a trademark," he notes, "since the way I use sound and music in games is slightly different than your ordinary action/adventure/sports games."

But is it? Mak doesn't think so. "Music is just another form of output that games can use as feedback for the player," he says "Much like graphics, the way music is used depends on the setting of the game. It might not always make sense to tie musical sound effects with in-game actions. For example, you probably wouldn't want guitar riffs to play every time you fire a gun in Call of Duty (though that would be totally hilarious),

Vib-Ribbon

No discussion of synesthesia is complete without a nod to a certain wireframe rabbit. Vib-Ribbon was brought to life by Masaya Matsuura on Sony's PlayStation in 1999, and broke so many conventions of the time it's a miracle the man wasn't out on the street minutes after its release.

From a visual standpoint, the game went completely against the grain of that generation's game design handbook. While everyone else was focussed on creating advanced visuals and pushing Sony's new wonder machine to its limits, Matsurra about-faced to white wireframes on a black background. But the main feature of Vib-Ribbon is in how it crafts those wireframes, and it's all thanks to your CD collection.

Like Dylan Fitterer's Audiosurf, Vib-Ribbon generates its side-scrolling platform levels from your own audio. It's then a matter of controlling Vib via rhythm-based button presses throughout the course of the song to make him avoids obstacles and pitfalls. And like the evolving avatar of Mizuguchi's Rez, Vib will go through various stages of evolution to indicate his health – when he's down to a frog or a worm, you know you're in trouble.

What's more, there were sequels of sorts. Mojib-Ribbon utilised the same basic concept but generated its levels from text files, while Vib-Ripple had the character bounce around digital images loaded into the game by the player.

One of the fisrt true synesthesia games

in the same way that you probably don't want to draw flowers instead of tracer bullets every time you fire the gun (though equally hilarious).

"In a sort of John Cage-y sense, I think all games use 'music' in the same way that music games like Rez and Everyday Shooter use music. It's just that the 'music' isn't traditional music you're used to hearing, but the music of the soundscape – think Cage's '4'33"'. The soundscape in COD is very much composed in the same way the music in Everyday Shooter is composed, except instead of guitar riffs, it's gunshots."

END SOLO WANKERY

Which brings us back to synesthesia, and why it's such a powerful tool in videogame design. Sure, countless games have packed recordings of gunshots, but now designers have been finding ways to let us see them in a manner beyond showing us a metallic tube spewing fire and noise. It's an important step in the path of game development, as it demonstrates a willingness of designers to try something a bit more out-of-the-box than jumping on the photorealism bandwagon, implementing Quick Time Events or tacking on motion-sensitive controls. It shows that games don't need to be set in any sort of tangible, real-world environment, that a goatee-stroking storyline isn't a prerequisite, and that there's more to see than what's already visible.

But more importantly, synesthetic games seem the best demonstration of the power of videogames, in that they can bring to life something that many of us will never see, and allow us to be an active participant. Synesthetic games bring the medium to life in a manner that Ben Affleck prancing around in red leather will never achieve. That's the power of videogames, and that's something that's sure to make everything else green with envy.

The first synesthetic Robotron

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HYPER HY0175

Reviews

REALITY BYTES

DARREN WELLS

There Will Be Blood

Perusing over some of the games in this issue raises a curious point. God of War: Chains of Olympus is all about swinging those Blades of Athena in the most blood-letting manner possible. Every screenshot of Ninja Gaiden 2 shows blood, blood, blood, and more blood. Watching Dirk play Vikings in the office gave me more than my recommended daily intake of beheadings. And as for Condemned 2, well, if you're not shoving a homeless guy's face through a plate-glass window and watching him choke on the shards, you're not playing it right.

Whether you look at this month as snapshot of a year of gaming, or compare it against the months of yore, it's hard to look past just how violence-centric some games have become. Note the word "some". Not all games contain that vicious red classification sticker; that much is obvious. But it seems that in today's marketing climate where attention is everything, games that do offer the crimson stuff will often go for broke.

Ladies and gentlemen, I declare that we've reached Peak Blood

Maybe the writing was on the wall all those years ago. Back in the halcyon era of the 90s, one game was best known for giving things a stir: Mortal Kombat. Digitised actors, buckets of blood, severed limbs, and de-necked heads sporting dangling spines raised the ire of parents and politicians the world over. It was the arcade machine that was always surrounded by crowds of excited teens, hollering and whooping each time someone pulled off Sub Zero's fatality. When it came time for Mortal Kombat's console appearance, it was clear that the gore was important to its success: Nintendo, presumably in an effort to stick with its family-friendly image, change drops of blood to beads of sweat and watched sales drop. Sega went with the unaltered version and, despite battling the superior hardware of the SNES, emerged the victor.

It was clear: violence sells. Games like Carmageddon, Quake II and Phantasmagoria embarked on the blood-brick road, and since that time, many, many others have followed suit. It's culminated to a point where, today, that sort of stuff is par for the course. Grizzled gamers barely bat an eyelid at the amount of violence in their games. Some even insist on more – just ask anyone who's played Jedi Academy if they've played with the cheat that lets them dismember stormtroopers with their lightsaber.

Ladies and gentlemen, I declare that we've reached Peak Blood. We reached a point where game violence is no longer the bad boy it once was, and never will be again. Of course that's not solely the fault of ever-escalating games – it's important to consider mass media as a whole. Charred corpses on the six o'clock news, the increasing level of movie special effects, extreme video clips circulating the Internet, you name it.

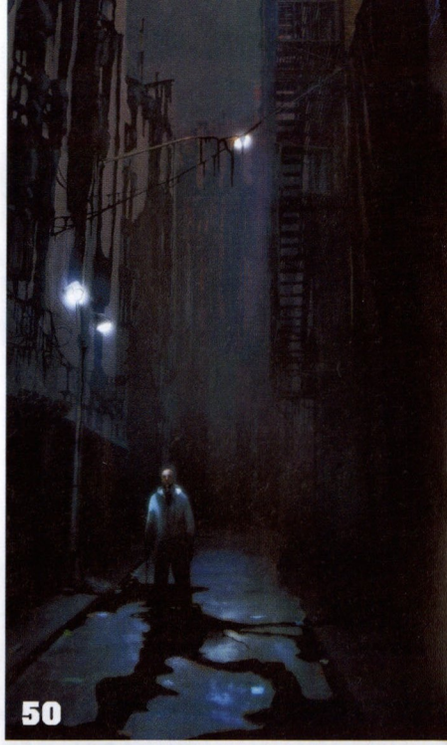
What's a controversial game to do? Something that some have been toeing the waters of over the last couple of years: nudity and sex. Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude and Singles: Flirt Up Your Life are both geared around boobies and poontang, and both are known solely because of that fact. (Both, naturally, are banned on these shores.) Conversations about God of War inevitably lead to the question "So, did you see that sex mini-game?" Fahrenheit is known for a lot of things – Mayan prophecies and rogue AI among them – but it's the sex scenes that receive the most attention.

In a society where violence is the norm, sex gets games noticed. Sex is the new violence. Where things go from this point is up to the developers, but I guess when the next Mortal Kombat game features a Nudality, we'll know how we went.

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

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Dog of Woof: Chow of Lumps	Cod of Waz: Chunks in Oil	God of Wang: Chimp of Ollies	Bod of War: Chins of Nymphs	God of Warm: Champs of Olympics	God of War: Chains of Olympus



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Stand back - that cow has tasted human flesh!

You've got red on you

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

God of War: Chains of Olympus

And people think **DANIEL WILKS** has anger management issues

category: **Action** / players: **1**
developer: **Ready at Dawn**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$59.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **Now**

It's a pity that Ready at Dawn didn't have Chains of Olympus ready for the PSP launch as we can guarantee you that if it had been one of the launch titles the Sony handheld would have rocketed into the market, instead of trundling along at a rather sedate pace until fairly recently. Chains of Olympus would have shifted units, not just because of the name and the sales strength of the franchise, but for the simple fact that it's really bloody good. Good enough that we will say that it's all but a system requirement. It's one of the few real killer apps for the system.

A prequel to the PS2 God of War games (and perhaps a hint as to the story of God of War 3), God of War: Chains of Olympus takes place during the time Kratos worked for the Olympians (the gods of Olympus, not the elite athletes soon to be competing in Beijing, that is) to pay off his massive spiritual debt. After killing his way across half of Greece to stop the Persians, Kratos is faced with an even more dire problem that could not only harm the gods he is forced to work for, but also end life on Earth. Being something of a nihilist, Kratos isn't necessarily the most suitable person to choose to save the world, but the scriptwriters have done a fantastic job of manipulating both the character and the player to kill their way through the known world, the underworld and beyond to save the planet.

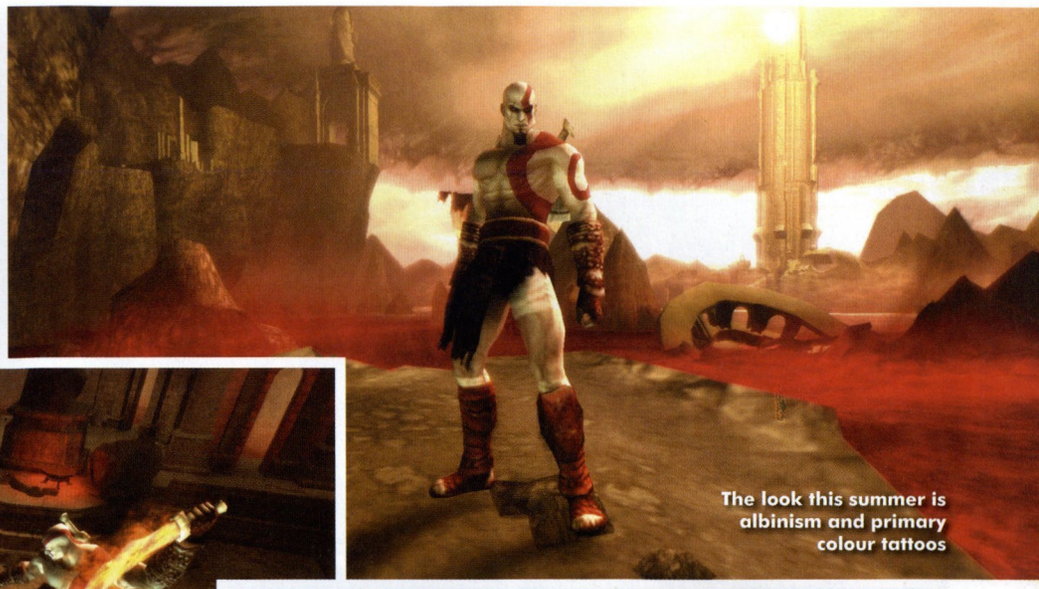
R.A.D. (AN ACRONYM)

Ready at Dawn, best known for their work on the PSP game, Daxter are quickly proving themselves to be the go-to guys if you want a kick arse hand held version of an existing franchise. When we heard that there was going to be a handheld version of God of War we were worried on a number of points. Firstly we were dreading a simple console port, keeping the story and events intact from the PS2 games. We were also worried about the limitations of control – we feared that the player may have to switch their time between the thumb nub and the d-pad to move and dodge in a misguided attempt to emulate the PS2 left stick move, right stick dodge control scheme. We obviously didn't have to worry on the first count and we're pleased to say that the new dodge mechanics, designed specifically for the handheld work brilliantly.

Basic gameplay remains faithful to the God of War franchise, with Kratos killing all and sundry with his whirling "Blades of Chaos", finishing moves, and magic he picks up on his adventure. There are also the usual (though noticeably simpler) puzzles to solve and epic boss battles that combine learning sequences, good old combos and quick-time events to trigger spectacular kills. The combat system is pretty much button perfect so players familiar with the franchise should be able to pull off their favourite combos in no time flat. The new dodge mechanic we were so worried about before getting our hands on the game takes a while to learn but is incredibly well implemented. To dodge, the player holds down the two shoulder

Kratos continually fails to grasp the basic concept of skipping rope

FIVE ACROSS THE EYES Chains of Olympus, somewhat disappointingly, only features one extra weapon that Kratos can wield. The Gauntlet of Zeus is a giant glove that transforms Kratos into an inhuman punching machine. Whilst some of us in the office like to think that the glove turns Kratos into Ivan Drago, promptly causing them to shout "I vill crush him" in their worst Lundgren/Russian impersonation, we refer to think that the gauntlet transforms Kratos in Snoop Dog's character Captain Pimp, laying a beat down to all of those ne'er-do-wells that don't pay him no respect or owe him trick money. Hopefully in the next game Kratos will gain access to a pimp cane and a fedora to complete the ensemble.



The look this summer is albinism and primary colour tattoos

!!! Watch out for the interactive boobies just after the first boss fight.

No pillar is safe from Kratos' wrath

buttons, modifying the thumb nub to dodge rather than move. It's a very intelligent decision as half the time players will already be holding down one shoulder button in combat to either block an attack or to ready some magic to cast.

The quick-time events are also still playable, fun and well implemented. It should be compulsory that every developer thinking of implementing a quick-time event into their game be forced to play at least one God of War game before they can start development so they understand how to do it right. Each button press triggers something cool, making the player feel as though they are still in control, rather than simply triggering a canned animation. Amazingly, Chains of Olympus features what can only be described as the most heart-wrenchingly manipulative button mash in the history of gaming shortly before the final battle. Never before had repeatedly mashing the O button made you feel like such a bastard.

333MHZ OF JOY

That is not to say that God of War: Chains of Olympus is perfect. The main game itself is short – players should be able to make their way through their first playthrough in five to six hours. It's a little disappointing that the game is so short – you barely have to recharge your battery to get through it – but it is nice to see a game that doesn't have to rely on creating superfluous levels or instituting a system of pointlessly hard cock-blocks to extend the life of the game, a tactic we've seen all too often of late. That said, there is a decent amount of replay value in the game, playing through each of the four difficulty levels and bonus challenges to unlock all of the extra content. It's also a little disappointing to note that some of the things that made the original games so interesting, such as swimming, using the Blades of Athena as swing lines, extra weapons and the like are either not present in the game (in the case of swinging) or have simply taken a back seat to the button mashing combat. It's also a little disappointing that aside from the first boss, none of the boss encounters feature an epic battle in terms of scale. Aside from the Basilisk, the bosses are all around Kratos' size, and although the make for fun battle, they lack that truly exhilarating sense of achievement you got when taking down one of the giant bosses in God of War I and II.

» The boost in power to the full 333Mhz has been fully utilised

The boost in power to the full 333Mhz has been fully utilised by the team at Ready at Dawn, allowing them to deliver what is most probably the best looking game on the PSP. Chains of Olympus is absolutely gorgeous, looking just like (and sometimes better) that the PS2 games whilst all the time running at an absolutely rock solid framerate. The combat animations are almost PS3 perfect, making it a very easy game to come to grips with if you've played ay games in the franchise. The Audio is equally good with a brilliant soundtrack and some suitably sultry/hammy/angry voice acting from the entire cast.

[above] Kratos loves his new Spirograph

When it comes down to it, God of War: Chains of Olympic, for its myriad small faults and oversights, is still a brilliant game. The overwhelming feeling you get while playing it, aside from a sense of immense satisfaction that is, is amazement that Ready at Dawn have been able to fit the game on to a PSP. Technically it's an absolutely staggering achievement. «

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

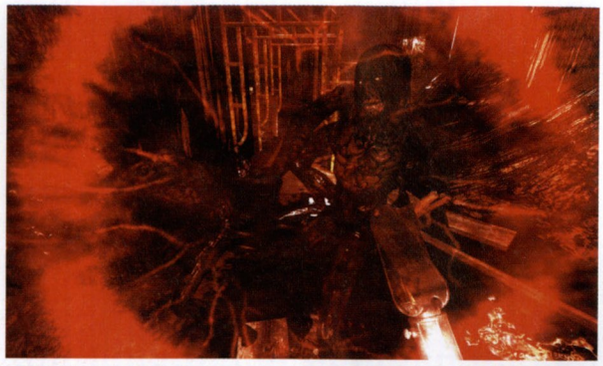
Absolutely stunning; familiar, faithful controls; pimp hand	Only two weapons; only one giant boss; a little short	HYPER VERDICT

An awesome technical achievement and a damn fine game to boot

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
97	90	94	92

There's a few multiplayer modes this time around, but they're nothing that'll turn the game into an insta-purchase. The meat and potatoes is found in the singleplayer game.

So shiny you could swear it's the Unreal 3 engine



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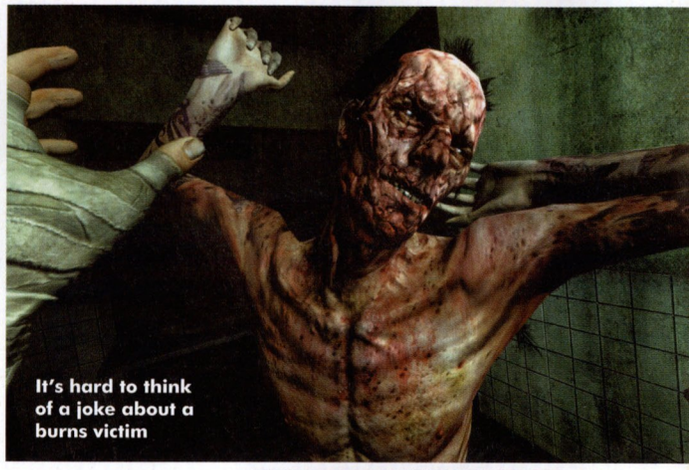

It's hard to think of a joke about a burns victim

Condemned 2

DARREN WELLS got eaten by a bear.

category: **FPS** / players: **1-8**
developer: **Monolith**
publisher: **Sega**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **MA15+**
available: **Now**

Anthony Burgess would be pleased. Condemned 2 holds no punches, unleashing lashings of the old ultraviolence upon any security guard, homeless bum or tar man who dare to stray into its path. It almost revels in its brutality, flaunting it with glee, and because much of the game involves the use of melee weapons, things get nice and messy nice and close, and rarely affords you the luxury of a distanced confrontation.

Ethan Thomas has been left a grungy shell of his former self, now looking like one of the hobos he'll spend his first five minutes of the game thumping on. It's not long before he's coerced back into duty, grubby face and all, and is wielding a baseball bat or electrical conduit as if he never let go.

THWACK!

Players of Condemned: Criminal Origins will know what to expect in this department. Most items can be picked up and wielded as weapons, from bricks to prosthetic arms to toilet seats. Enemies stagger back, choking on their own blood or holding a mouth of broken teeth, and with the game now supporting environmental kills, you can drag them over to a television or a metal vice to finish the job. Combos also mean you can string together punches to deliver some whopping damage, and a more forgiving stance on firearms sees them used more often this time, with pistols, shotguns, and automatic rifles all featuring. On the whole, the revised combat feels more rounded this time, although there are still a few niggles. Going from wrench to firearm may require a visit to the Options menu to manually enable the crosshair.

But the Condemned formula was known for its two-pronged approach – crime investigation alongside the carnage. It's in this area that Condemned 2 shows the most improvement. Rather than enduring a round of My First Forensics Session that told the player what tool to use and when to use it, the game now requires the player to use their own powers of observation. Approach a relevant situation and you'll be prompted to enter Investigation Mode, whereby your remote partner will ask you for some details. Can you ID the victim? Is that bullet hole an entry or exit wound? What was the time of death? It's up to you to find the answers from a range of options, and your performance is evaluated based on the information you select. It's a much better fit for the task this time around, and evokes a legitimate sense of satisfaction rather than the aping of on-screen prompts.

EWWW!

It's all wrapped around a game that loves the dank, the dark, and the decrepit. A number of moments gave us the willies at Hyper HQ, including a nice callback to the previous game's mannequin level and an abandoned doll factory that features waddling, exploding baby dolls had Wilks shuddering to no end. One scene set in the SCU offices stands out for being starkly clean and untainted in contrast. However, there are moments designed to reflect Ethan's decaying state of mind, which feature dripping black walls, festering enemies and dangling ceiling growths. They would look right at home in a H.R. Geiger piece, but they don't really fit here – the filth of the real world offers a better experience than the filth of insanity.

It's a fine game, despite its questionable morals (Drinking alcohol gives you better aim? Beating homeless people is a means to an end?) and one that will make you desire a wash afterwards. Just be sure to leave the krovvy-letting to the professionals. «

[below] ...I've got nothing. Sorry.

Better investigation mechanic, great visuals, dank atmosphere

Tar-baby enemies, occasional clumsy combat

HYPER VERDICT

A downright dirty game, but in this case it's a good thing.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	85	85	84

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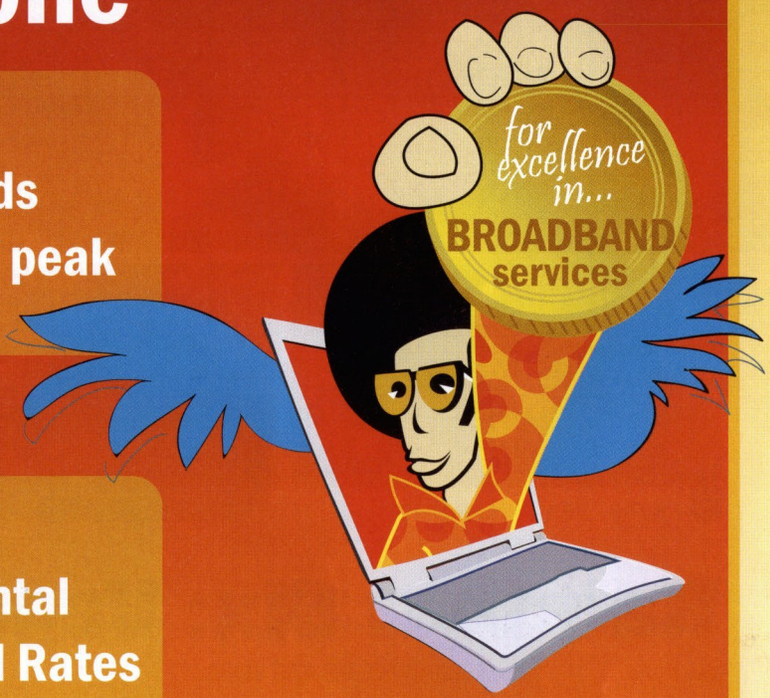

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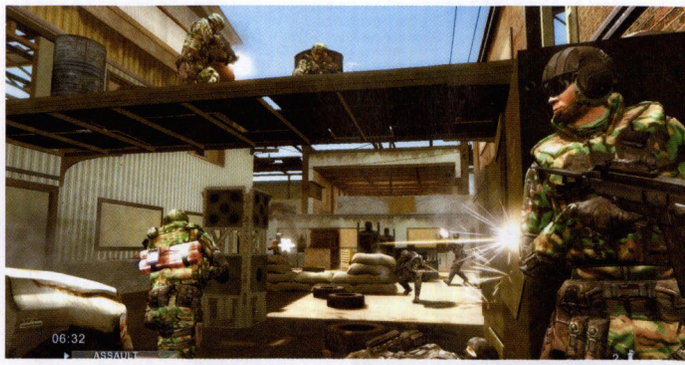
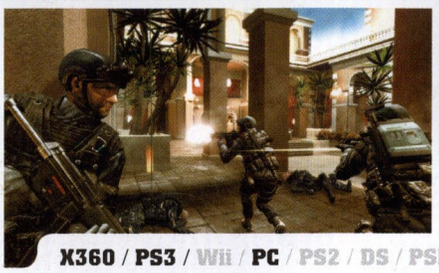
Equipment: Army
Shades: Gucci



That's what you get for playing with laser pointers in the cinema



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

Rainbow Six: Vegas 2

ELIOT FISH is ready to breach and clear...

category: **Squad FPS** / players: **1-Multi**
developer: **Ubisoft Montreal**
publisher: **Ubisoft**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **Now**

There's only one thing worse than a terrorist, and that's a cashed-up terrorist. The dirty bomb-hoarding bad guys in Vegas 2 are fitted with almost all the gear and gadgets that once gave law enforcement the edge - we're talking night vision goggles, flashbangs, riot shields and more. Just when you think a room is safely cleared, these buggers come rappelling through the windows lobbing smoke grenades. Damn.

IS MR. TERRY WRIST HERE?

Well-equipped terrorists are one of a few small changes in Vegas 2. There's also the Call of Duty 4 inspired ranking and experience system for your character, a sprint button, and the ability to shoot through flimsy surfaces. Otherwise, Vegas 2 is very much more of the same fare that was in the first Vegas (which was itself influenced somewhat by Ghost Recon). Your health "recharges" if you momentarily stay out of the line of fire; hugging cover is crucial to surviving combat; the story unfolds through picture-in-picture video feeds on your HUD; helicopter rides ferry you in to missions; and you can re-jig all your equipment mid-mission from conveniently placed outfitting crates.

Vegas 2 has its fair share of ferocious fire-fights, but most of your time will be spent trying to be as stealthy as possible. And nothing in this formula has changed. You'll still approach a closed door, stick your Snake Cam under it to scout for enemies, tag them for your two squad mates to target as soon as you breach, decide whether you should use a flashbang, smoke or frag grenade, and then give the green light. Most rooms have multiple entry points, so you'll want to choose the most tactically advantageous one - which usually involves having your buddies enter from one door whilst you surprise the enemy from another entrance, such as a window. There's a LOT of this is Vegas 2, which should come as no surprise.

But this methodical level clearing of enemies feels stale now. What's worse is that some of the same old flaws remain, such as enemies behind closed doors not hearing the gunshots and explosions that are happening a few rooms away. Vegas 2 is also guilty of some horrid enemy spawning, triggering when you walk through certain doors or walk past a certain point. One particular lone wolf mission through an oil refinery produced bottleneck after

[above] Eat lead bargain shoppers!

[below] Somehow the palm had learnt how to defend itself

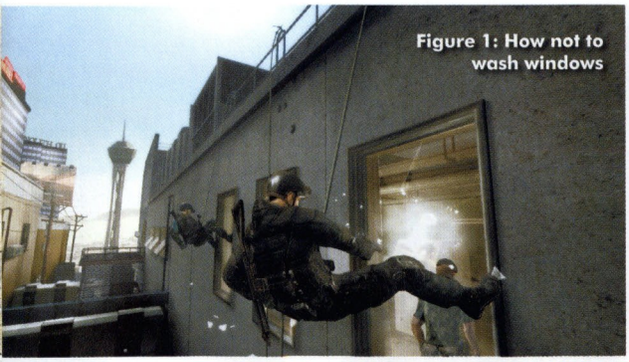
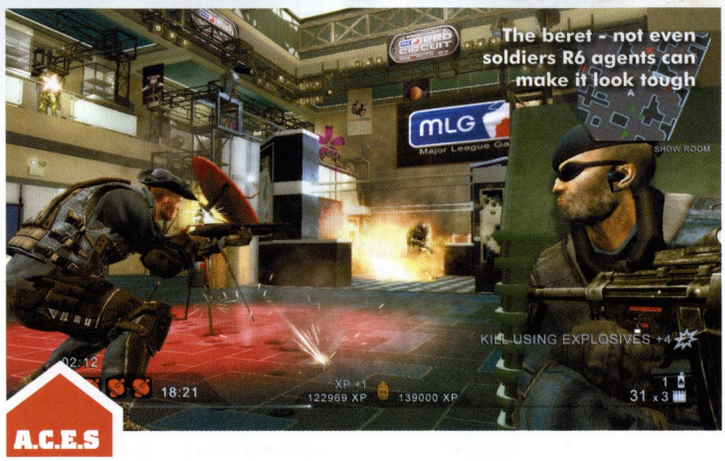
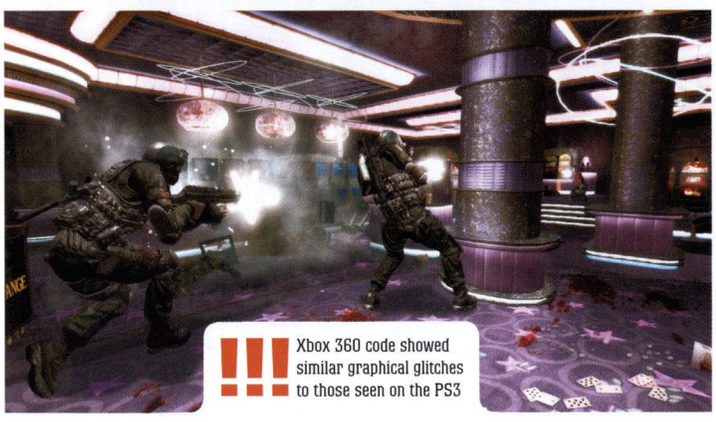


Figure 1: How not to wash windows



The beret - not even soldiers R6 agents can make it look tough



!!! Xbox 360 code showed similar graphical glitches to those seen on the PS3

A.C.E.S

The fancy new Advanced Combat Enhancement and Specialisation system in Rainbow Six Vegas 2 is designed to reward the player based on their play style. Basically, it all boils down to killing enemies in specific ways to acquire points in Marksmanship, Assault or Close Quarters Battle.

For instance, performing long range headshots, taking down shielded enemies, making a kill using blindfire, killing with explosives, shooting someone point blank or through cover, and popping an enemy with his back to you all contribute toward your A.C.E.S achievements. Oh, and levelling up naturally comes with its tasty rewards...

bottleneck of bad guys, which was finally conquerable when figuring out where the triggers were.

At least the terrorists are generally pretty smart - they stick to cover, move position when you're least likely to notice, surprise you from different angles, and lob grenades at you if you've hunkered down. The huge, sprawling levels in Vegas 2, such as the labyrinth-like convention hall (set up for a games industry event no less), make for some thrilling cat and mouse shootouts, with plenty of scattered clutter for both sides to use as cover.

WELCOME TO GLITCH GULCH

Despite a few advances in AI - for instance, we like how teammates take a little longer to get into position because they need to stop and cover for each other as they work towards to the selected waypoint - Vegas 2 shows signs of glitchy behaviour. When directing your squadmates to lob a grenade at a specific location, your orders are occasionally ignored - either that, or your men will throw the grenade directly into an object too close to them, resulting in unfortunate accidents. Then there are occasions when enemies appear to get stuck, jittering about like they're being electrocuted, or teammates fail to move into position because there's a barrel that they've suddenly forgotten how to walk around. These glitches aren't game killers, but we seem to remember the first Vegas having a much higher level of polish.

We reviewed Vegas 2 on the PlayStation 3, so we can only comment here on the visuals for that platform, but we must say we were disappointed in the simplistic, blocky depiction of Vegas from the air; the unconvincing character models (the hostage victims being the worst offenders); and the drab environments that lack a fine level of detail (it's funny spotting sealed off security rooms that have windows but no doors. Whoops!). There's a level of realism that is sorely missing from Vegas 2, which leaves much of it feeling like nothing much more than a terrorist hunting exercise, despite the interwoven story.

» Playing the single player game nets you XP that advances your ranking

Playing the single player game nets you XP that advances your ranking, which in turn unlocks new camouflage paints, clothing, armour and gear, allowing you to fully customise the look of your character for online sojourns. The Counter Strike-style Versus modes offer plenty of promise, but it's probably Co-op that will prove the most popular. Friends can join you in the Story mode (in split-screen if required), or you can go on custom-created Terrorist Hunts together.

Overall, Vegas 2 is an average sequel. Despite the aforementioned gameplay additions, the game treads all-too familiar territory and lacks the polish of its predecessor. «

Co-op on realistic difficulty is always a blast.

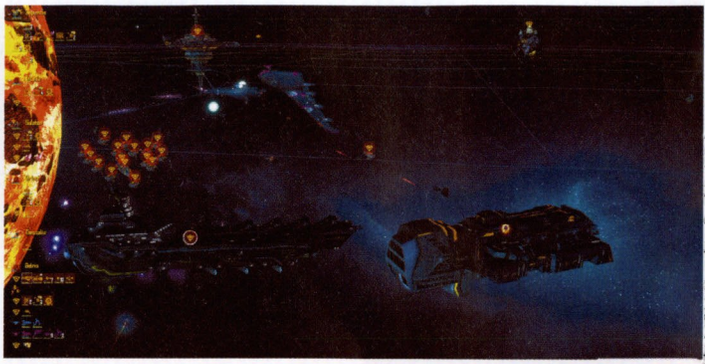
Been-there-done-that-scenarios; lack of detail and visual realism.

HYPER VERDICT

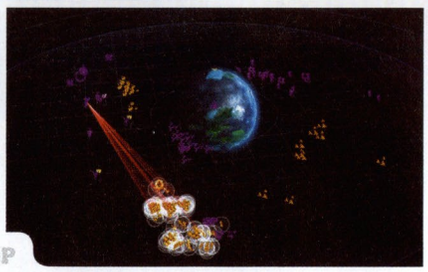
If you're going to Vegas, hit the casinos instead.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
76	82	75	74

Everybody loves lasers



Welcome to the pastel universe



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

Sins of a Solar Empire

TIMOTHY C. BEST ups shields and gets into some deadly sin

category: **Strategy** / players: **1-10**
developer: **Ironclad Games**
publisher: **N3VRF41L**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **TBA**
available: **Mid April**

When Sins gets rolling you could imagine Darth Vader looking out over it from his shiny Deathstar, and not want to force choke the developers. Yeah, it's that good.

It does space battles right, carefully splicing together real-time strategy and the feel of something a little more turn-based. It gives you evil Empire and it gives you heroic fleet battles, but what's really neat is how well it blurs the two.

The secret is its ya-zoom-zoom-zoom. You can look at an individual squadron of fighters and then zoom out to take in the capital ship that launched them. Zoom out a little farther to take in the battle that's sweeping up that capital ship, then step back further to show the entire gravity well around a planet, which is the stage for the conflict. At the final level of zoom you can take in the entire star map. It's seamless, and all of the research, planetary construction, and grand fleet manoeuvres move to the tick of same clock as the frenzied plasma exchanges. What's really cool is that it works.

Jumping between planets is just quick enough to support grand strategies involving distant staging points, but it isn't so quick that you can shrug off being caught with your pants down. Once you zoom into the middle of the battles the action still manages to really hop — fighters move like chained lightning and capital ships lumber with deadly grace.

Seriously, this game gets full praise for the way it handles sprawling space battle, without dropping the ball on razzle-dazzle or playability.

There is a steep learning curve, but that comes on two fronts: figuring out that this is neither StarCraft or Master Orion — trying to play it like either a bog standard RTS or turn-based strategy will flip your lid; and, secondly, learning to use all of the game's neat gauges, icons and filters. Once you know where to find information, you'll know what's happening with a glance (or maybe a glance and a click or two, at the worst) and that's a huge achievement for a game tracking wars on several fronts across more than a dozen planets.

The non-combat empire building side is all there, but it is designed to support the persuasiveness of high-energy weapons and rockets. You have planets to conquer and manage. You have tech trees to navigate, there are resources to collect, and you can even dip your toe in a little diplomacy if you like.

NIGGLES

The turn-based depth is stripped back to a lean but flexible core to serve up strategic options, rather than micromanagement. You can't hand-craft your own races or ships, for example, but you do get three well-defined civilisations to play and a nice selection of RTS-style units. These units score extra depth thanks to twists plucked from the tech tree and the fleet-modifying special abilities of your hand-picked capital ships (which have classes, level up and gain experience, like any good hero unit).

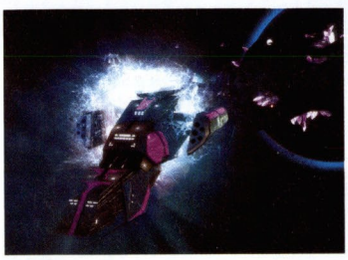
The research options go just deep enough so that opponents have to stay on their toes and guard against more than just a frigate rush. The economic game allows you to buy off pirates (or other players using the game's bounty system), and going the cultural route (I suspect it involves fast food, pop-songs and Rambo movies) makes your planets harder to take while disrupting the youth of nearby systems. There aren't a huge number of techs powering each of these strategies, but they are cleverly priced and spaced to make them viable but a bit of a gamble.

A small gripe with the research is that the game only gives you one set of researchers for fleet, military and civil advancements, meaning that if you get a little click happy it can be really tough to know what's coming up next. Also, since the game lets you select options that will become available after a building has been finished, it can trap your solitary team of boffins in

[below] A universe made entirely of saffron

Welcome to the tie-dyed universe

Often, the difference between a niche strategy title and your next Homeworld, Total War, or Company of Heroes is a little razzle-dazzle. Sins definitely has the legs to turn a few heads.



a dead end if something goes wrong with the incoming facility. It's not a huge niggle, but it does make the research side of the game a little more micromanagement intense.

All in all, however, the game does really well streamlining the excess of many turn-based games, while still leaving nooks to explore. Tricks like how to out-manoeuvre the slow-turning capital ships to take advantage of their arc of fire, the power of directing all of your fleet's fire into the right target at critical moments, keeping enemies at the right distance then luring them into your defensive structures, and even how to control the galaxy map by using the pirates and guarding strategic the choke points where spaceways that link planets meet.

There are a number of scenarios for small, medium and large galaxies and these games can take from 40 minutes to days. There's also a map maker if you get bored with what Ironclad has to offer. A list of Achievements gives you a few more things try on your way to galactic domination. As a single-player empire building game, Sins is pretty solid, although veterans will be found wanting a tougher AI as they get the game down. While that would normally be a bit of a killer, what takes Sins up a notch is the multiplayer side of things. Here you can have up to 10 players can battle it out across the various maps. It works a treat, and the bounty system that lets you anonymously offer any takers cash prizes for attacking your foes (or allies) adds a little spice to proceedings.

It'll catch you off guard and wondering how two hours felt like your 30-minute lunch break.

On the down side, after a while you will start to feel a touch constrained by only having three races to explore, and players used to RTS missions linked by cut-scenes and unlikely plot points, might miss a traditional single-player campaign, especially after they bone up on the back-story between the poor human traders, the relentlessly self-improving psychics of the Advent and the alien intruders of the Vasari.

MAKING REAL-TIME

Considering that this is Ironclad's first game, Sins is pretty not bad. It features sparkly good looks, a polished gameplay mash-up and zoom that makes Supreme Commander look like a noob.

If you dig a little deeper, you'll find that the core members of the team came from the old Barking Dog Studio that developed Homeworld: Cataclysm and which did a little contract work for Valve on Counter-Strike. Hmmm ... I wonder if they brought any of those players with them to this game ... it would definitely explain me being called a "fag" and getting told to STFU in my first Sins multiplayer outing.

IRONCLAD ALIBI

The other sticking point is that the game doesn't quite know when to quit. There's no planetary council to vote you in, there's no race to Alpha Centauri to win and AI opponents won't quit meaning that even once you've broken the back of a game it'll make you follow through on the clean-up if you want the victory (and the Achievement crossed off your list).

Ironclad has been working overtime to roll out patches, updates and little thank you freebies. By the time you read this patch 1.03 should already be out, we've seen new maps, it toned down the pirates by demand, and the team has already promised fixes to the AI on the harder difficulties. I think it's fair to say there's still more in store for this one ... not that it's bad as it is. Far from it.

It'll catch you off guard and wondering how two hours felt like your 30 minute lunch break. Even once you do turn it off, it will have you dreaming up new approaches in the shower, while stuck in traffic, and through your significant other's Seinfeld-esque description of amazing fresh-squeezed OJ or mild alien abductions.

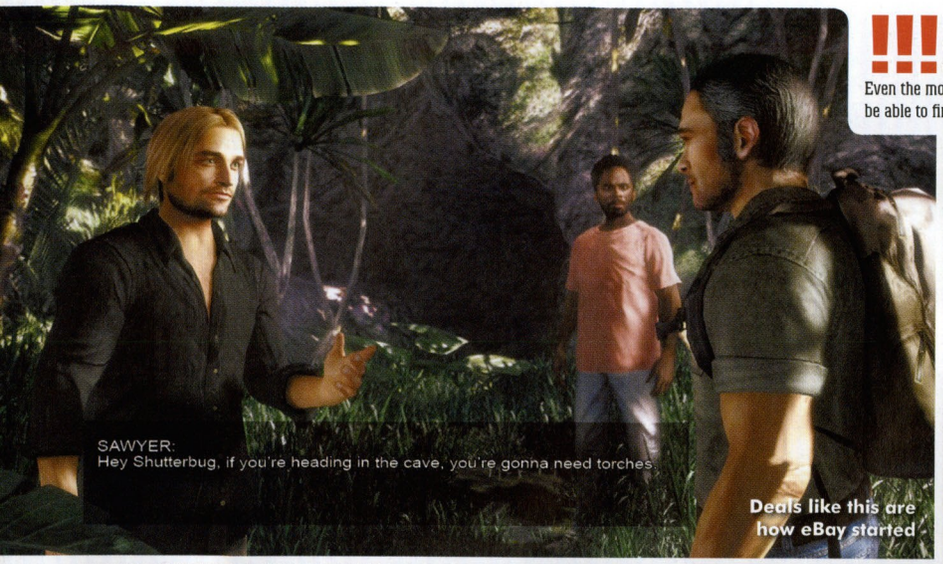
Stella mix of turn-based empire building and RTS flow.

Tough to get your head around, you'll crave an extra race or two

HYPER VERDICT

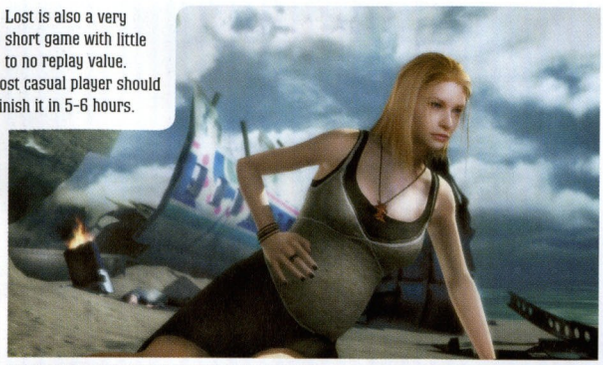
A new breed of epic space strategy warfare is here and it wants to colonise

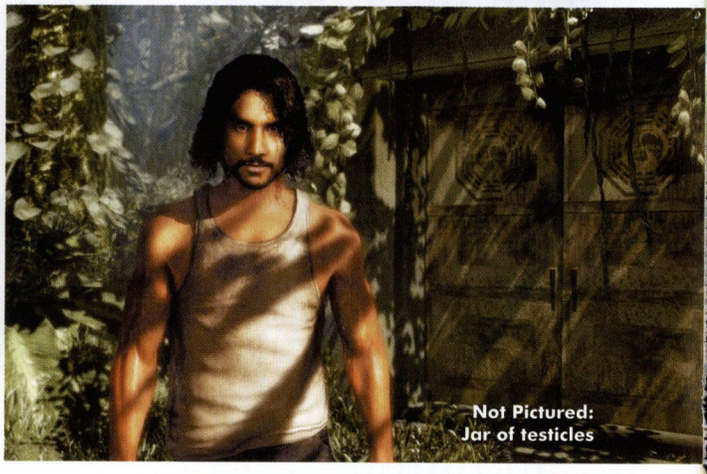
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
90	85	89	90



Deals like this are how eBay started

!!! Lost is also a very short game with little to no replay value. Even the most casual player should be able to finish it in 5-6 hours.





Not Pictured: Jar of testicles

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

Lost: The Videogame

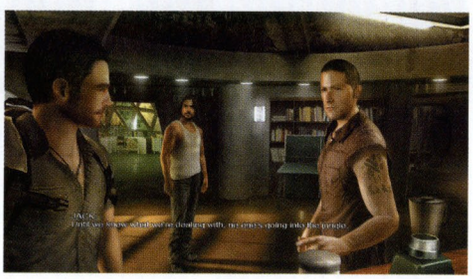
DANIEL WILKS lost track somewhere in the middle of season 2

category: **Adventure** / players: **1**
developer: **Ubisoft Montreal**
publisher: **Ubisoft**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

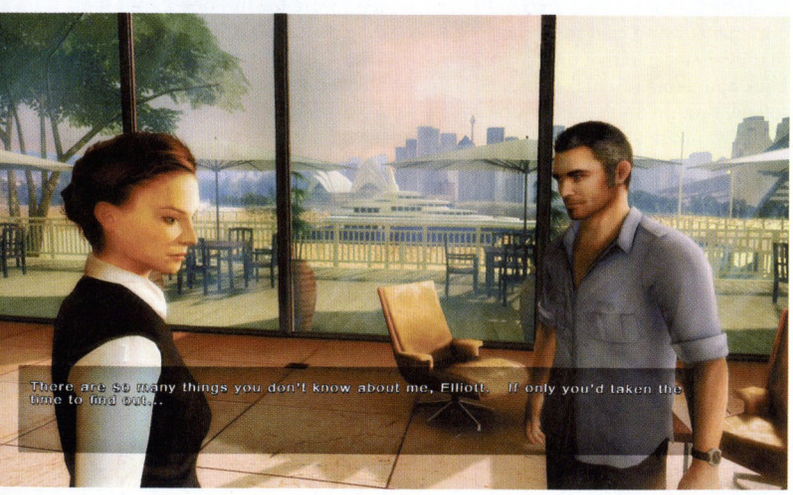
Structurally, Lost is brilliant. It's episodic in the best possible way, cutting down the action into dainty little bite-size portions that flesh out the Lost universe. Each episode is book-ended with a title sequence and kicked off with a "previously on Lost" highlights reel to help the player keep track of where they are, a handy conceit as the episodes sometimes leap forwards weeks in Lost chronology to recognizable points in the show to use as a launching pad for the next episode. Like I say, structurally it's genius but games, unfortunately, aren't just about structure.

Players take the role of an amnesiac photographer trying to both escape the island and reclaim his memories in an attempt work out why the hell he's there in the first place and why a bunch of people seem intent on killing him. Gameplay revolves around exploring the island and solving puzzles, with the occasional, usually quite well implemented action scene to break up the routine. The bulk of the puzzles either revolve around placing fuses in circuit boards so that the current not only runs to the correct circuit but has been reduced to the right level as well or answering a series of logic/math problems. It's a decent puzzle structure, though one that does get rather tired by the end of the game.

Action elements by and large revolve around running away from either the Black Smoke or some of The Others. Although it's possible to buy a gun in the game via the rather odd bartering system, there is hardly any need to use it so don't go expecting shooting sections.



[below] "Seriously baby, I'm a photographer!



CAPTURING MEMORIES

Far and away the most interesting and appealing gameplay element is the flashbacks. Before a flashback sequence, the player is shown a torn up photograph for a few seconds. During the flashback it's up to the player to take the correct photo to unlock the memory of the event. It's a clever mechanic that really makes it feel as though the player has actually achieved something rather than being a simple spectator watching a cutscene.

I'm usually the first one to get pissed off when some developer or PR mouthpiece turns around and says that a game is "not for core gamers". It usually means that the game in question is crap and that whoever is making the claim assumes that the mainstream "casual" gamer is too stupid to realize. Hell, I even have one of my little tanties about it in this month's Bad Cop. Lost, however, really isn't for core gamers, even though core gamers may make up some of the target demographic. Lost has a very specific target audience. If you're a fan of the show they you'll most likely dig on the game, as it does help to flesh out the island. If you're not a fan of the show, however, then there's very little to recommend the game to you, unless you're impressed by structurally brilliant, well presented games that tell fragments of a story you're no familiar with. «

Great presentation; structurally brilliant

For Lost fans only

HYPER VERDICT

For Lost fans, not you.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
85	80	60	55

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SCORE SOME EPIC LOOT?

Trade your opinion for e-points!

the point system

130 e-points
Cinema ticket
One adult cinema ticket

240 e-points
iTunes credit
$20 worth of new tunes

735 e-points
Dick Smith voucher
$60 worth of tech gadgets

1225 e-points
Westfield gift voucher
$100 to spend on the latest games

YOURVOICE.COM.AU/MISSION is the place to go to start giving your opinions on movies, music, TV and a range of other subjects and in the process earn e-points to trade in for some sweet gifts!

STEP 1

HAVE YOUR SAY
The team at YourVoice is dead keen to hear your opinion on everyday things from your fave foods to movies, music and television. Join now by completing a short five minute survey at the www.yourvoice.com.au/mission. It's FREE! You'll get e-points and an entry into the prize draw for your time, and you'll be one step closer to your ultimate reward.

STEP 2

UNLOCK YOUR E-POINTS
By simply answering online surveys you can make a change for the better, earn e-points and go into a quarterly prize draw worth $15,999. The more surveys you complete, the more e-points you earn and the closer you get to the loot! Make YourVoice heard by heading to the website.

STEP 3

SCORE EPIC LOOT!
Check your account details and once you have sufficient e-points, reward yourself with a free gift. Gifts range in the number of points required, so spend a little now or save for the big one!

To learn more visit
www.yourvoice.com.au/mission

YourVoice
A rewarding experience

!!! Turning Point features 8 player Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch multi-player.

Ooh, a high-concept zeppelin

And another

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

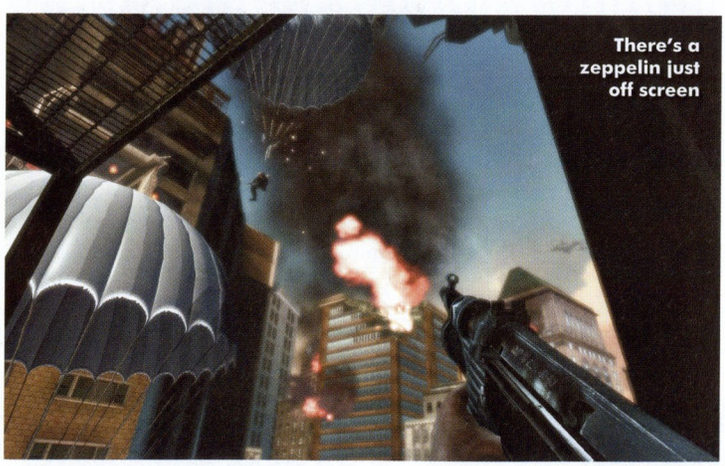
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty

YURI SPADEFACE is an everyday hero

category: **FPS** / players: **1-8**
developer: **Spark Unlimited**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **M**
available: **April 10**

Where would the world be without the everyman hero – the guy who transforms from being some shlub in a dead end job who just happens to be in the right place at the right time to do something heroic, like save a kid from a burning building, foil a robbery or stop a rape. These people are cool. They inspire a little bit of admiration and an equal measure of envy as you secretly wish you could do something as notable with your life. This is probably why the everyday hero is such a commonplace phenomenon in film and TV. These characters work when their actions are within the realm of the realistic.

The character you play in Turning Point, a potentially interesting alternate history FPS in which the Nazis invade New York, is a high steel worker who becomes a hero, defending his city against the Hun. At least that's the idea. Rather than an everyman hero, Dan Carson (I had to check online to find his name as I can't recall it being used in the game, not that the story kept my attention anyway), is a Nietzschian Ubermensch called upon to perform every single task of note in the war against the Nazis. Early in the game Dan, given a gun and a pat on the back by some soldiers, is sent off to deal with an enemy machinegun nest that has already claimed the life of at least one of the trained soldiers sent to destroy it. The soldiers, rather than helping, elect instead to stay in the safety of the train tunnels in which they are camped. Later he's called upon to blow up a series of tanks that, inexplicably, already appear to have bombs attached to them, leaving the player to complete a wiring mini-game that is literally impossible to fail. All this happens within the first 30 or so minutes of the game, and it goes downhill from there.



There's a zeppelin just off screen

HIGH CONCEPT, LOW DESIGN

Turning Point feels like a game that was never really made. The idea for the game – Nazis invading New York – is, to agree with the CEO of Spark Unlimited, a great "high concept" idea in the traditional sense of things. It appears, though, that the developers forgot that there actually had to be some compelling gameplay tacked on to the plot. The game is terrifyingly linear from beginning to end with not one alternate route or hidden goodie to be found but that wouldn't be a problem if the level design was compelling. It's not. The levels are dull with little in the way of interesting encounters, a problem exacerbated by the fact that the AI is rarely particularly aggressive, or for that matter, smart. The Ai won't flank or perform any kind of tactical advance, but will wander around, shoot at random and sometimes just ignore the player entirely. Then there's the problem with the big hand icon that appears whenever the player can interact with something. It works fine with doors – doors are big and flat so have a large trigger area – but smaller items the player interacts with, such as switches, ladders and the like become a pace killing battle to stand at the right distance and look at the right pixel to trigger the device. The aiming mechanics are also rather twitchy and, rather amusingly, the iron sights on some of the guns are so big that you can't see a target that isn't standing on your toes.

Turning Point isn't a truly terrible game or a truly broken game, but it is a game with few redeeming features. The combination of a great idea, a dull story, a boring character, glitch mechanics and an inconsistent framerate do combine to make a game you should avoid, no matter if you're a core gamer or not. <<

Good idea; a few good sequences

Dull level design; dull story; poor controls

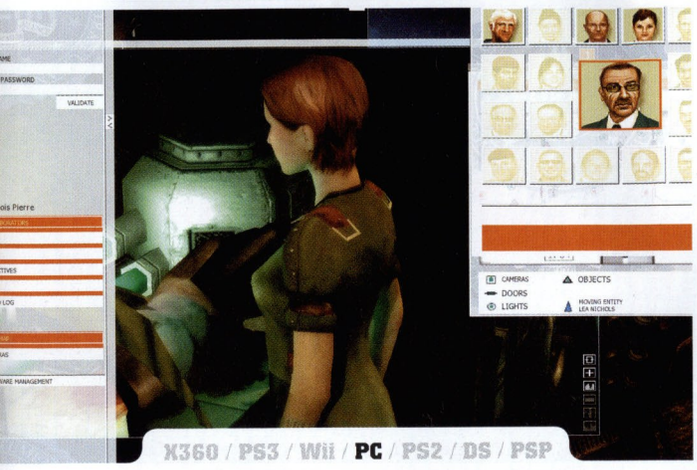
HYPER VERDICT

Great idea, terrible execution

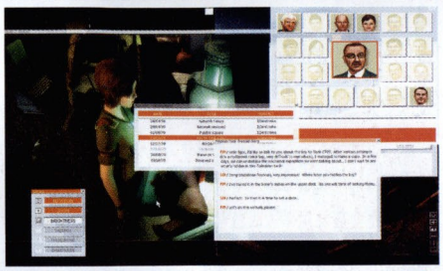
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	75	58	55

Keen observers of the adventure genre will note that The Experiment – known elsewhere as Experience 112 – has been available for a while now. But when the concept is as intriguing as this it's still worth a look, tardy as it may be.

The new look Confession Room isn't too comforting

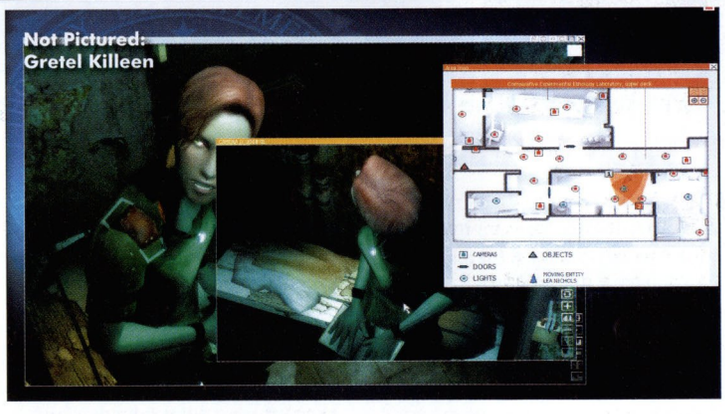


X360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / DS / PSP



The Experiment

DARREN WELLS likes to watch



category: **Adventure**
players: **1**
developer: **Lexis Numerique**
publisher: **The Adventure Company**
price: **$59.95** / rating: **T**
available: **Now**

In a world of weird pitches, "Big Brother meets Resident Evil" would rank among the strangest, yet it's possibly the best way to describe The Experiment, a most curious adventure title. It crafts its atmosphere via carefully-placed camera angles common in suspense horror, but utilises them in a voyeuristic manner, and unlike most titles that cast you as a character in a game world, this is a game where you're playing as yourself.

You're behind the controls of a surveillance system on an old cargo ship, abandoned except for Lea Nichols, who wakes up in a makeshift medical room. She sees an active security camera trained on her, but when it doesn't follow her as she moves towards the door, she decides she can trust you to help her escape. From there you're juggling between multiple cameras, opening doors, activating terminals and illuminating the way forth, all from your remote position, and never once controlling Lea directly.

I CAN SEE YOU!

You don't click on a part of the game world to move Lea, you flick distant lights on and off in order to attract her attention. You don't click on items to pick them up, you can only direct Lea to points of interest, whereby she'll decide if something is worth collecting. Sometimes, because of the distant nature of you and her, you might need to attract her attention to something more than once – from your vantage point you can see something, but she can't, and you might know how to use it, but she might not.

Granted, when you look at the game's nuts and bolts, it's still a distant cousin of the age-old point-and-click approach. However, the game's presentation helps stave off that realisation just long enough for it to draw you into its world. The action is played out entirely via your system's computer interface – having you pore over e-mails, dossiers, profiles and records to obtain information and passwords – as well as the fixed surveillance cameras. Not all of them will be useful: Some will be glitchy, some will be blurry, some will have their view obscured by an object that fell down after its installation, but all go towards maintaining the illusion.

In fact, everything in The Experiment is crafted to keep you in the game. It never for a second presents itself than anything less than the core concept: you helping an imprisoned woman escape. Loading screens display data synonymous with connecting to a new camera feed rather than loading textured polygons, and Lea will even remember how long it's been between sessions. "You've left me here for three days!" she chastises as you resume your game. "But I managed to find some food and water."

Her voice is something you'll hear a lot of throughout, as it's largely just you, her, and a big creaking boat. Because of this, a lot of attention is drawn to Lea's speech, and unfortunately it highlights the fact that her voice acting is not great. Given her situation, Lea sounds too composed. Her delivery is not at all natural or off the cuff; it's spoken with the same precision and composure as a missile silo warning that calmly states there's three minutes until detonation. It's not the only sign of paltry production qualities, as there's also the odd typo in the text, not to mention next to zero system optimisation – get more than one camera angle on-screen, and it's a system hog.

It's an interesting twist to the classic adventure genre. Here we have a game character who is not only aware that she's being controlled by an unseen person (videogame postmodernism, perhaps?), but she insists on that control. She relies entirely on your direction, and is helpless without it. It's truly a bizarre feeling to play a game that holds the main character at arm's length, and rather than working against it, it contributes to its success. The Experiment has got some niggles, but be damned if it's not one of the most creative titles in recent months. «

Intriguing concept, clever puzzles, plenty to read

Non-convincing voice acting, system hog, possibly frustrating

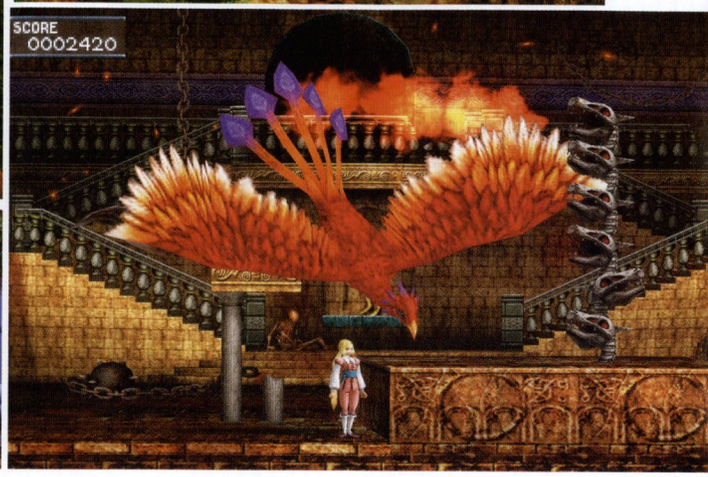
HYPER VERDICT

Fans of adventure games and lovers of innovation, this is your next purchase.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
74	72	83	**80**

It's some kind of unprocessed burger!

!!! Be careful when jumping on stairs – unless you push up while landing you'll fall through them to whatever is below.



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

Castlevania: Dracula X Chronicles

NURY ANTRIM is going to whip it good

After what seems like an age, thanks to numerous delays, Castlevania: Dracula X Chronicles is finally here. It's a game with a rather bizarre lineage and makeup. The main game is a port (with a rather stunning facelift) of the largely unplayed PC Engine game Castlevania: Rondo of Blood, supported by unlockable versions of a poorly emulated Rondo of Blood and a slightly reworked Symphony of the Night. If you're a fan of the Castlevania series you may as well stop right here. This is a game that you want to own. If you're new to the Castlevania franchise, or have only played the 3D PS2 games you may want to read on, because Castlevania: Dracula X Chronicles takes the series back to its roots.

Rondo of Blood follows the exploits of the rather awesomely named Richter Belmont, a direct descendant of Simon Belmont, as he tries to save the love of his life, Annette, from the clutches of evil forces. What follows is an unforgiving, and, for newcomers, somewhat uninviting old school side scrolling action/platform adventure, as Richter (I'm going to call my first kid Richter) whips and jumps his way through nine levels of challenging action, some nasty bosses and some old school mechanics we'd rather had gone the way of the dodo.

[below] Looks like a case for Visine

WHIP IT, BACK INTO SHAPE

Combat is very straightforward. There are no weapons to switch between or magic to learn – there's just Richter and his whip and his side-weapons, such as limited supplies of throwing knives and holy water. The level design is brilliant, featuring multiple hidden areas and even whole secret levels and bosses. What is less brilliant is the unforgiving nature of the checkpoint system that will sometimes see players kicked back to a checkpoint miles away from where they died, and the fact that the player has a finite number of lives per level, the loss of which will kick the player right back to the beginning of the level, is definitely something that can make even the calmest of gamers scream. The high level of challenge doesn't help this matter. There's nothing wrong with a game being challenging but sometimes Rondo is downright punishing, requiring almost pixel perfect jumps and split second reflexes to survive.

Probably the most disappointing feature of Dracula X Chronicles is how difficult it is to unlock Symphony of the Night. We haven't managed to unlock it yet but from what we understand, rather than just receiving it once we complete Rondo, we actually have to seek out and find a hidden object to unlock the game. If it were simply a video or some small reward we wouldn't complain but Symphony is a large part of the appeal of Dracula X, and making it a chore to find seems to negate the purpose to us.

If you're a lover of Castlevania then you need to own a copy of Dracula X Chronicles. If you're new to the franchise then this is a pretty good place to start but you better get yourself ready for some hair pulling frustration, a lot of deaths, some unforgiving checkpoints and some controls that will probably leave you screaming. «

category: **Action/Platformer** / players: **1**
developer: **Konami**
publisher: **Konami**
price: **$79.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Old school fun; awesome unlockable content; we can finally play Rondo

Old school mechanics; punishing difficulty; Symphony is hidden

HYPER VERDICT

Great fun but be prepared to scream a little

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	86	84	**82**

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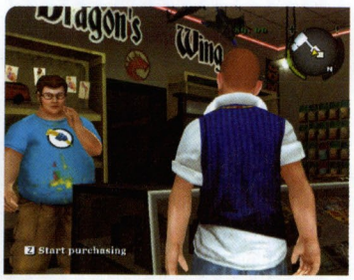
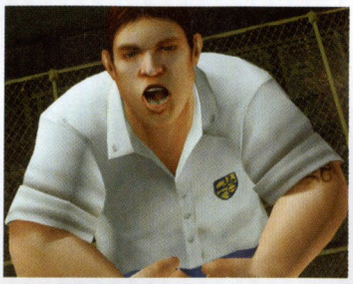
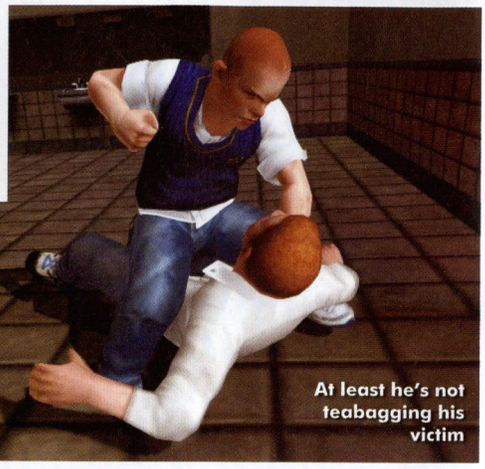
Like loading screens? You'd better if you want to play Bully, as they'll pop up all too frequently.







At least he's not teabagging his victim

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

Bully: Scholarship Edition

Who gave **DARREN WELLS** an atomic wedgie?

category: **Action**
players: **1+**
developer: **Rockstar Vancouver**
publisher: **Rockstar Games**
price: **$79.99** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

What was once called Canis Canem Edit is now relaunched under its original title, Bully. And where there were once dual thumbsticks on a black console, there are now wireless Wiimotes on a white console. Everything in between is the same, but really, what did you expect?

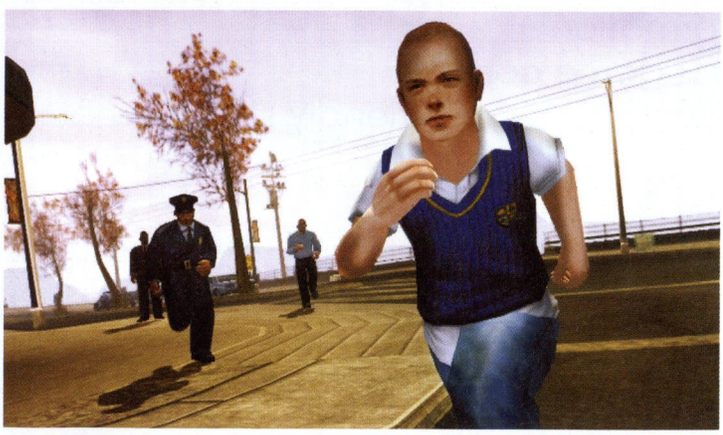
Bully is shovelware, no bones about it. The same game that did the rounds on the PS2 is now available for the Wii, sporting a subtitle of "Scholarship Edition" and the obligatory handful of extra classes and missions. So assuming you're well-versed with the game on Sony's console, what is there to warrant another look on the Big N?

[below] Run, run, run. I'm coming to get you!

SCHOOL'S OUT!

First, let's go over the lesson plan for those who came in late. The concept of Bully seems logical enough: take the expansive freedom in Grand Theft Auto and translate it to the life of a schoolboy. After all, when you're still in the throes of puberty, school kind of does seem like a perilous world. Classes to attend, authority figures to mock, peers to conform with/rebel against... it never ends! Throw in some colourful characters and some good ol' Dennis the Menace tomfoolery, and the rest writes itself. There's no reenacting Columbine here; it's just a disgruntled kid wading through a bad situation the only way he knows how.

Yet despite the missions and the setting seeming mundane alongside a world of rocket launchers and police chases, the game manages to be an involving one. Tasking the player with class attendance introduces a nice semblance of order into the genre, and rather than feeling restricting it actually forces one to economise their time and decide where their priorities lie. Even the punishments fit the crime: get caught breaking the rules by a teacher or prefect, and it's yard duty for you!



SLAP IN THE FACE

But all this remains unchanged from the original PS2 version, so it should come as no surprise to learn that the main difference between that and this is in the Wii's unique controller. The bulk of the game is controlled in a regular fashion (the usual button-and-analogue-stick deal), but a handful of instances use the console's motion-sensitive powers. Instead of mashing buttons to kick and punch a fellow student, you're performing the actions by moving the Wiimote and nunchuck. Slingshot-based missions that see the camera change to a tighter over-shoulder perspective use the Wiimote to point and shoot like a lightgun, although with the scantest motions translating into wildly veering movement on-screen, the sensitivity leaves much to be desired. And yes, even some of the lesson mini-games, such as Chemistry class, incorporate motions rather than button presses.

Speaking of classes, Bully attempts to offer a multiplayer component. But rather than compete in the free-roaming world against a split-screened friend, you're facing up against them in the mini-games. Contrary to how they function in the singleplayer mode, taking them out of context for a multiplayer mode achieves nothing of note. It's hardly an exhilarating time playing against your mate as you place a flag of Poland on a world map.

It's not a game for those who already own it on the PS2, as the new control scheme and scant extra missions do nothing to change the core experience. But if you're looking to see what all the Bully fuss is about and don't mind sacrificing some screen resolution for making actual biffo motions, then by all means... «

Diverse missions and activities, freedom, subversive vibe

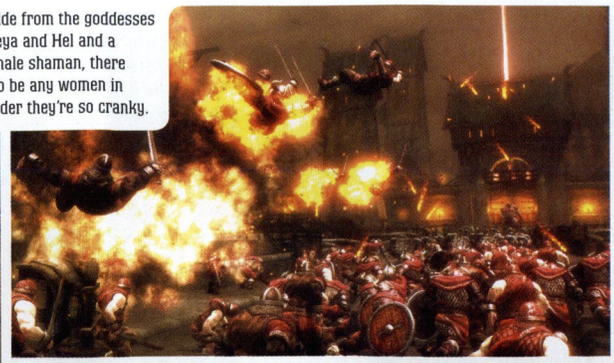
No noteworthy new features, motion controls hit and miss

HYPER VERDICT

Get it if you don't have it, but don't if you do.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
72	76	81	**80**

Aside from the goddesses Freya and Hel and a female shaman, there doesn't seem to be any women in Viking. No wonder they're so cranky.



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

Viking: Battle for Asgard

DIRK WATCH likes his men rugged

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

Before getting review code for Viking we know very little about the game aside from the fact that it was being developed by the UK branch of Creative Assembly and that, as the title promised, it would contain at least one Viking. Well, now we know more about the game. We know it's about a Nordic badarse by the name of Skarin, tasked by Freya to free the lands from the demonic minions of Hel. We know that it's a hack and slash game with unexpected moments of strategy and stealth as well as some RPG style elements. We know that it takes an open world(ish) approach to the subject matter. We know it's gory as hell and we know, most importantly of all, that it's pretty damn good.

Each level of Viking: Battle for Asgard takes place on a large map with a heroic home base and an enemy stronghold, as well as numerous other points of interest such as ancient ruins or farms. Through undertaking quests – given to Skarin by the now ubiquitous NPC with an exclamation mark above its head – or exploring the map, it's up to the player to fulfil requirements to unlock the final battle for the level and release imprisoned Vikings who will join Skarin's army. Because the levels are large and it can be a chore to keep running back and forth between quest and quest giver, Viking features a system of Ley Stones that allow players to teleport between them one they have been discovered, seriously cutting down travel time. Exploration is rewarded with stashes of gold that can be used to buy weapon and health upgrades, new moves, potions and the like.

I'M NOT BEOWULF!

The bulk of the game is dedicated to combat, and thankfully the engine is up to the task of keeping the player entertained. The engine starts off deceptively simple with a light attack, a heavy attack and a block but soon become much more interesting thanks to the fact that Skarin can learn numerous combos and special moves as well as magic, allowing him to imbue his sword with elemental effects. Skarin can also deliver brutal finishing moves to injured enemies, gutting them, hacking off limbs, beheading them and all manner of nastiness. The combat is a little slower than other games of the hack and slash ilk, making fights a little more tactical than contemporaries like God of War or Devil May Cry. Compared to Kratos or Dante, Skarin is a blunt instrument, suited to smashing one thing at a time.

At times during each level, Skarin can call upon his army to help fight certain battles. During these times, Viking plays much like a pretty Dynasty Warriors in a horned helmet, with the AI soldiers fighting rank and file and the player having to fight all of the battles that really matter. Skarin also gains the ability to summon drag ons to help him in combat. Rather than aiding on the ground, the dragons can be called upon much like an air strike, with the player designating a target and watching in satisfaction as the dragon rains fiery death from above.

Viking is quite a nice looking game, with lush vegetation and some satisfyingly brutish character models and gory dismemberments, but the most impressive feature is the sheer number of units that can be on screen at any one time – during some of the later battles there appears to be hundreds of units going hell for leather. The soundtrack is decent but fairly forgettable fair. It appears Creative Assembly took a leaf out of Beowulf's book when it came to the vice acting by not casting anyone who sounds even remotely Nordic.

Viking: Battle for Asgard isn't going to win any games for originality but it's definitely a fun little romp that should keep fans of action entertained for a good while. Now we're off to decapitate some minions. «

Good, visceral combat; epic battles; brutal

A little repetitive

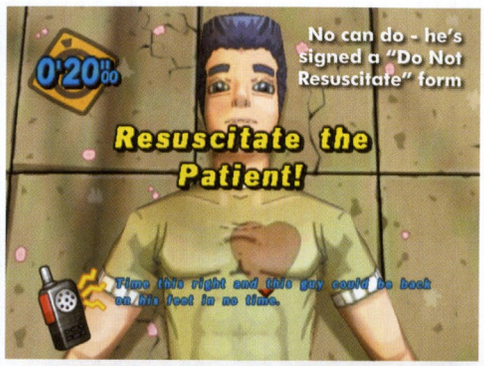
A fine, if somewhat derivative addition to the action genre

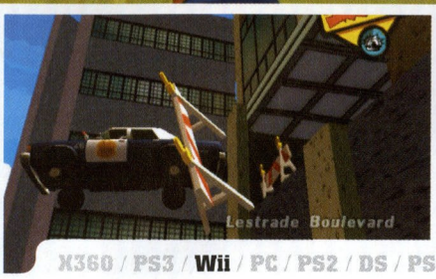
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	82	86

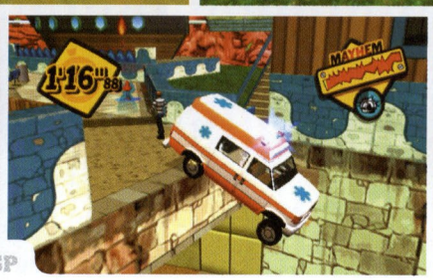
HYPER VERDICT

84

!!! We did this as a conversational review as neither of us wanted to keep playing it, let alone review it







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

Emergency Mayhem

DANIEL WILKS and **DARREN WELLS** are about to save your life

category: **Mini-Games**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Canopy Games**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$99.99** / rating: **G**
available: **April 25**

Wilks: When I first heard abut Emergency Mayhem it was pitched as being Crazy Taxi with the emergency services. I liked that idea. I still like that idea, and when someone finally makes that game I'll be first in line to play it. As you may have guessed, Emergency Mayhem is not Crazy Taxi with an ambulance or police car - it's a collection of repetitive mini-games bound together by some dodgy driving. Mini games on the Wii? Who would have thought?

Wells: And they're not fun mini-games, nor are they well designed. In between guiding an overly-sensitive fly out of a patient's digestive system and defusing bombs by cutting squiggly lines, you'll find all manner of reasons to be frustrated. Fail a task and you get called a "looooooser!" by radio dispatch. Certain missions saddle you with a damage meter that seems to arbitrarily decide when you've wrecked your ride. Heck, there's a Fire Brigade task that's solved quicker by shaking the Wii-mote in a manner akin to jerking off rather than using the technique suggested by the game. In fact, there's not one task in the game that provides any semblance of enjoyment. Like a clown with a spinning bow tie, it does what it thinks is fun, but ultimately trips over its oversized shoes.

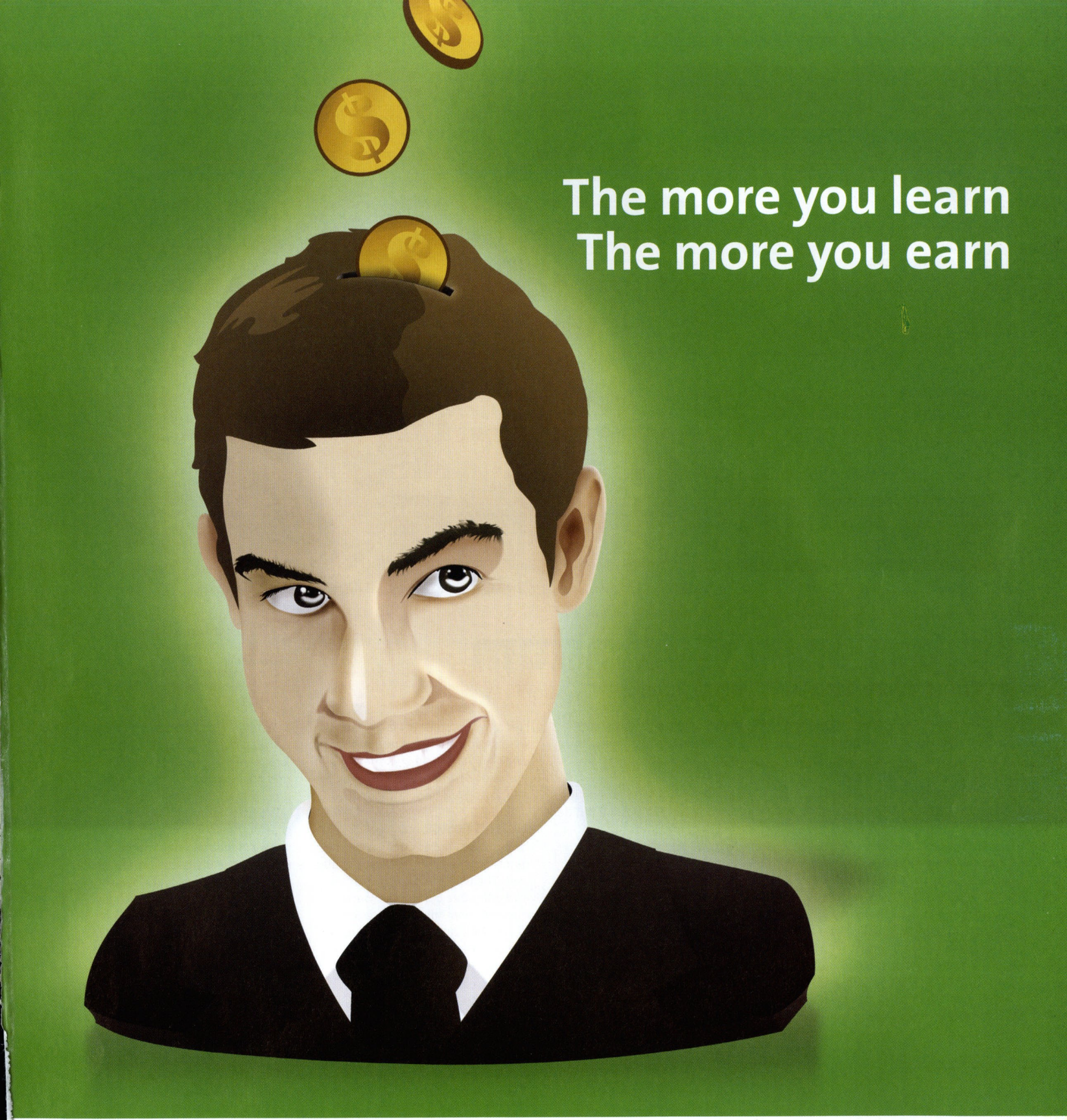
[above] Not pictured: DIsneyland.

Wilks: Just one more little rant on mini-games collections on the Wii. I've heard a few times from PR types that their developers make mini-games collections because they sell, but I think it's something of a self-fulfilling prophecy – if every second game on the console is a mini-game collection of course they're going to appear on sales charts.I think this whole "looooooser" thing is what troubles me the most about Emergency Mayhem. I'm sure as soon as this review goes to print I'll get a call or email from Atari telling me that it's a kids game so I should be more lenient on the overall mechanics but I'm at a loss to think why insulting a kid for failing an arbitrary task could be considered a good thing. Anyway – back to the game itself, players drive around small sections of a city trying to bring down their Mayhem Meter (Mayhemometer?) by playing mini-games, such a putting out fires, re-wiring traffic lights or guiding a fly out of some "dumb guy", all in an effort to unlock a new "Precinct" with more mini-games. There's also driving challenges, such as getting some doughnuts to cops before the time limit runs out. Geddit? Doughnuts! Cops love doughnuts!

Wells: Believe us, driving IS a challenge, just not in the good way. The directional arrow points directly to an objective while on the road, rather than guiding you along the best route to get there. That means you'll find yourself looking at a brick wall when the arrow is pointing straight ahead, and often needing to drive away from its guidance in order to find an available road. It's counterintuitive, not to mention poor game design, and coupled with the shoddy vehicle handling, it makes the game a brutal chore to play. The only thing that appealed was the fact that the radio dispatch voice comes from the Wii-mote speaker – it's a natural fit. Everything else, not so much.

Wilks: The voice coming from the Wiimote speaker is a good idea, but the fact that there only seems to be about 20 different voice samples per district, all of which are unskippable does away with the novelty value pretty damn quick. Whilst by nature I'm pretty down on mini-game collections, believing them to be, for the most part, the laziest form of development on the Wii, I can admit that some mini-game collections are good and a lot of fun. Emergency Mayhem is not. There are too few interesting games and not enough different control styles, all bound by a lacklustre hook. Give it a miss and keep your fingers crossed that developers start making real games for the Wii. «

Uses the Wiimote Speaker	Dull mini-games; vehicles handle badly; arbitrary rules	HYPER VERDICT
Dead On Arrival.	VISUALS 55 / SOUND 54 / GAMEPLAY 33	31



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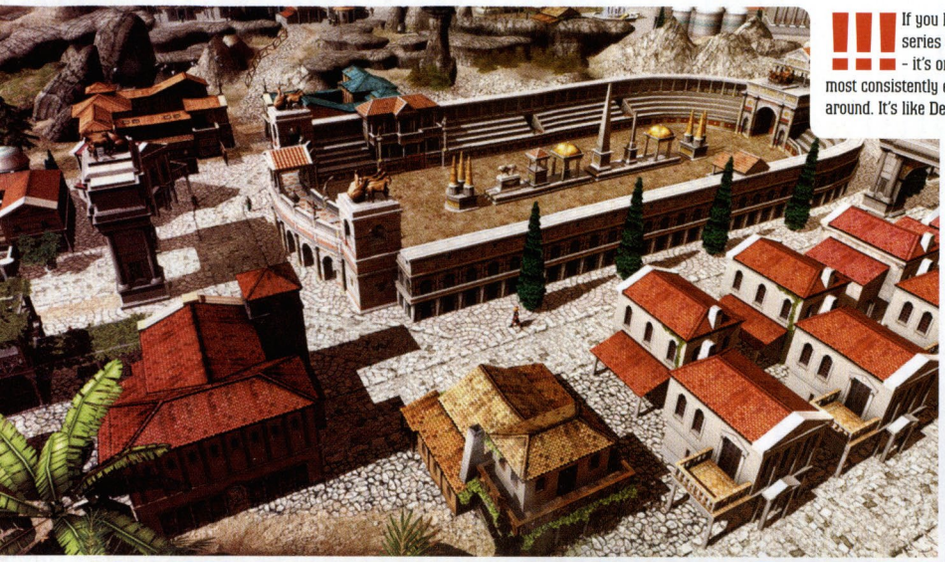
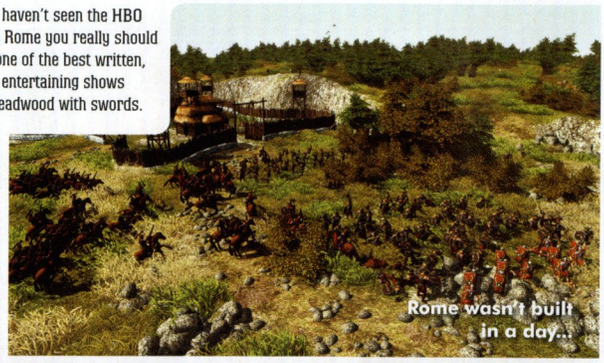
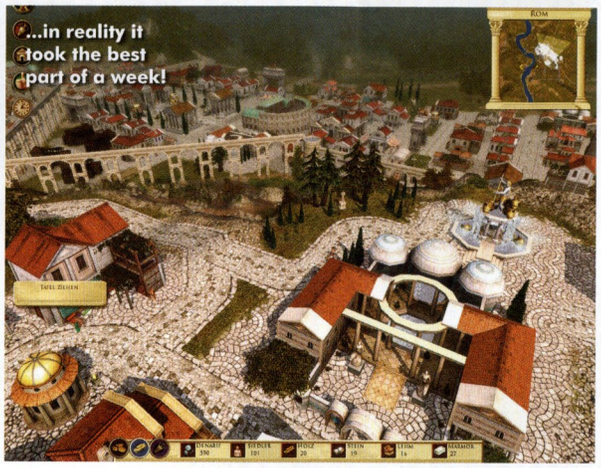
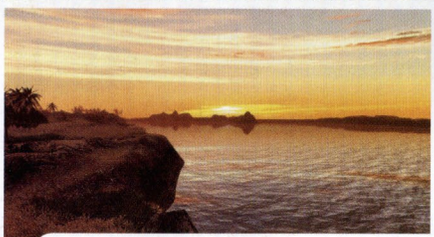


!!! If you haven't seen the HBO series Rome you really should – it's one of the best written, most consistently entertaining shows around. It's like Deadwood with swords.







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

Imperium Romanum

CHRISTIAN READ builds Rome in an afternoon

category: **City Builder** / players: **1**
developer: **Haemimont Games AD**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Do you remember that bit in the HBO show Rome where Lucius Vorenus, mad with grief, in the middle of a gangster facedown swears himself to dark powers by screaming 'I am a Son of Hades!" Then he screams a whole lot of obscenities? It's awesome because, for a start, historical people swearing is funny and secondly because you know you're about to see some awesome Roman-style total frigging massacres.

Imperium Romanum isn't like that. No. At heart, this is a city builder. A slow, sedate and engrossing one but a city-builder for all that. In fact, it comes off as something as a Dad's Game and like watching an HBO show with your Dad, it is something of an acquired taste.

It's a simple and familiar enough grounding for any fan of the builder or even RTS game. Start out with some workers and some money. Mine stone, chop wood and then work on the barracks and all that. There are some fun additions I haven't seen before, with pig farms, dyers shops to supply uniforms to your goon squads and a sort of built-in class system. It's all familiar, though.

You aren't actually building Rome over and over, by the way. Imperium Romanum offers a variety of scenarios, challenging you to build cities in various geopolitical climates. Creating towns in deserts will see you always struggling drinking water and creating cities in the wilds of Gaul will require you to militarise your population tout suite.

[below] This isn't a misplaced Viking screenshot

NO TITUS PULLO?

No surprises there, right? Well, the game does two things exceptionally well. The User Interface is clean as a whistle. One of the best you'll ever see. Everything radiates out of a simple cursor click. Not only is it simple to play it gives a bit of speed to setting up your city. Stats are easily obtained and deciphered; your mini-map is easily read. This is greatly appreciated as the real mechanism of the game is balancing how much food and materials your buildings use up and valuing that against what good they're doing for you. Like most sims, it is an addicting process.

Graphically, this is also top notch. Textures are rich, the buildings are well designed and the landscapes varied and eye-catching. A particularly sweet little feature is that watching the way workers go about their rounds will give you clues to where to place buildings for maximum efficiency. Micro-views will also give you a rather fetching look at high-level details that are pretty unexpected. Fire, a constant threat, is almost worth it. As are the rather droll sequences involving chasing down errant criminals.

It isn't all good news, though. Combat is really badly done. It's a matter of choosing one of two formations, then pretty much just running them up to barbarians and hoping you've got more men than them. It is boring, chancy and there is no real skill in it. Not only is it a drag when you find yourself in conflict, worse, it's a distraction from the fun parts of the game that eats up too much time. It just doesn't feel like you're a part of the mighty Roman Empire, striding the world like a colossus.

So it might not be an action packed game of savage battles. It is intricate, requires time and tactics and plays at a firm if slow pace. If you're looking for just another game of blowing away aliens and guns and screaming, move on. While the combat drags it down, you'll find Imperium Romanum a good-looking game, if rather sedate, game. «

Looks grand, champion interface	Familiar gameplay, terrible combat	HYPER VERDICT
A solid, not amazing, city-builder.	VISUALS 88 / SOUND 83 / GAMEPLAY 75	75

Advance Wars: Dark Conflict

ELEARNOR EIFFE goes to emo war

category: **Turn-based strategy**
players: **1- Multi**
developer: **Intelligent Systems**
publisher: **Nintendo** / price: **$69.99**
rating: **M** / available: **March 31**

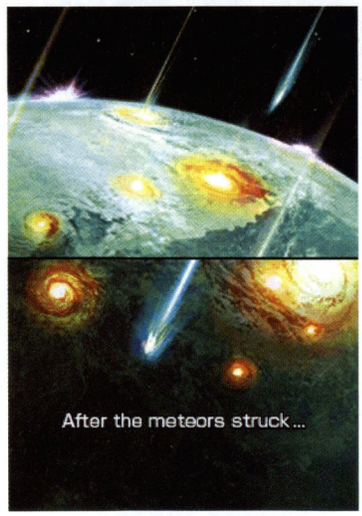
If you've played an Advance Wars game before, you already have a pretty good idea of what to expect from Dark Conflict: brow-furrowing turn-based strategy, with a complexity that belies its cartoonish appearance. You'll also notice that Dark Conflict adopts a very different tone from its predecessors. In narrative terms, it's a complete departure from what has come before. The game takes place in the wake of a global catastrophe that has wiped out 90% of the world's population. The bright, primary coloured look of the old Advance Wars has been swapped for a pallet of browns and greys. Battles are waged to a relentless soundtrack of "DER-nernerner" guitars and thrashing beats. The exuberant COs of old have been replaced by a cast of bland, dreary emo types who never tire of reminding you that war is very, very serious. Dark Conflict is clearly trying very hard to be "adult", but it's really more like a sullen, pouting teenager.

NOBODY UNDERSTANDS MY STRATEGY

Dark Conflict also differs from its predecessors in ways that are more than cosmetic. As you might expect, there are also some new units to play around with, such as the Bike, Flare and Anti-Tank unit, and some new types of terrain, including the thematically appropriate Ruins and Wasteland. Additionally, units can now "level up" over the course of battle, gaining a rank (I, II, then Ace) every time they defeat an enemy. The role of COs on the battlefield has been dramatically scaled back. You can still take advantage of the COs' unique abilities, but you'll need to deploy them with a unit to do so. The CO will only affect units within a certain range on their own. While it can be argued that COs were somewhat overpowered in previous Advance Wars games (especially Dual Strike), the Dark Conflict approach makes CO deployment such a hassle that they may as well have removed them from the game entirely. Speaking of things being removed entirely, the shop is gone! While you now have the ability to play Story Missions individually to improve your rank, there's nowhere for you to spend your hard earned points.

An interesting side note: Dark Conflict and its US counterpart, Days of Ruin, were translated from the original Japanese independently of one another. As a result, many of the places and characters have entirely different names in the two versions, as do some of the units. The latter makes things particularly confusing for Advance Wars veterans playing the European/Australian release. For example, Mech Soldiers are now "Bazooka" units and Artillery are now "Mech Guns". It's all a bit baffling, really.

Dark Conflict is perhaps even more difficult than other Advance Wars games, but the Story Missions start out gently enough that newcomers to the series won't be put off. The real challenge comes from the optional Training Missions. Many of these have an infuriatingly puzzle-like quality. If you don't find the "solution" (i.e. approach the battle correctly right from the start), you're set for a crushing defeat or, more likely, a protracted stalemate. It's incredibly disheartening to realise you've spent the last two hours fighting what has long been an un-winnable battle.


After the meteors struck...

Perhaps the best thing Dark Conflict has going for it is the introduction Wi-Fi multiplayer, a welcome addition to the Advance Wars formula. It's just a pity that the single player campaign isn't as strong as it could be. «

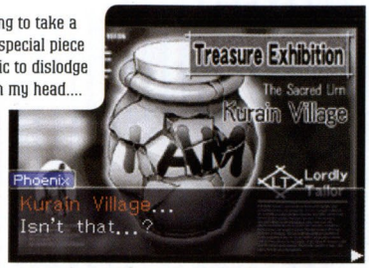
It's Advance Wars! Highly addictive; Deliciously meaty	Dull storyline. Terrible music. Can be frustrating.	HYPER VERDICT

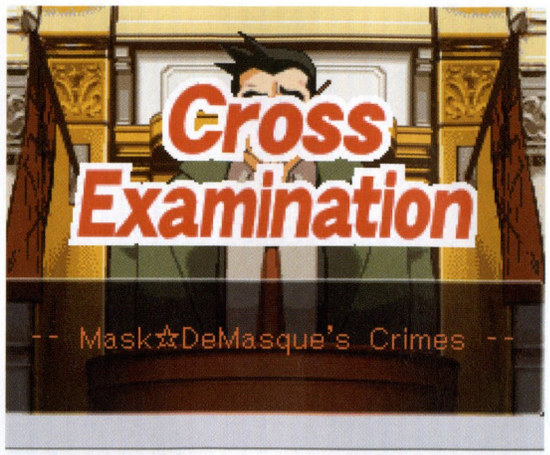
Advance Wars has dyed its hair black but it's still essentially the same game

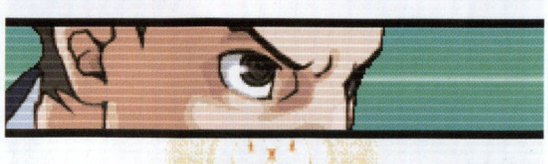
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	79	84

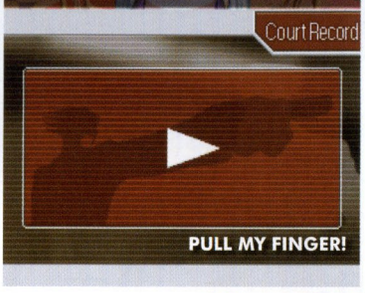
84

!!! It's going to take a pretty special piece of music to dislodge Godot's theme from my head....









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

Phoenix Wright Ace Attorney: Trials and Tribulations

JAMES O'CONNOR isn't going to make any awful 'objection' puns

Over the past two years, Phoenix Wright has quietly wriggled his way into the position of one of videogaming's most beloved characters in the West. It's a combination of things: the spiky hair, his strive for justice, his constant microphone-activated OBJECTIONS! - all enough to leave the player with a sense of sadness as the Phoenix Wright trilogy draws to a close. At the same time, it fills us with a great deal of anticipation for the next game, Apollo Justice, which looks to add a few gameplay changes that, going by this third game, the series sorely needs. The Phoenix Wright series, wherein the titular attorney seeks justice for a series of clients with the help of his spirit-channeling assistant, Maya Fey, rests its appeal on three pillars- characters, story, and the moments where everything clicks into place and you really feel as though you've brought your case back from the brink. As before, the game is split between investigation and courtroom scenes, finding the evidence to save your clients from prison and then pleading your case to the court over the course of five chapters. If you've played the first two games, you know exactly how it goes- and I mean exactly, because nothing has changed, in terms of gameplay, since the last game. Justice for All introduced the Magatama and the ability to present profiles, but sadly this third outing is devoid of any new mechanics. It also feels quite a bit easier than the previous games, telling the player quite blatantly what to do next or which testimony to present evidence on, which is a little odd considering most players will be seasoned veterans of the first two games.

category: **Adventure/Puzzle**
players: **1**
developer: **Capcom**
publisher: **Capcom**
price: **TBA** / rating: **PG**
available: **April 30**

[below] An early, failed, draft of Lord of the Rings

PHOENIX ALWRIGHT

The gameplay may not have changed, but the game does introduce a few excellent new characters and structure things a little differently. This time, you're not just in control of Phoenix- the game skips back into the past for two out of five chapters, putting you in the role of Wright's deceased mentor, Mia. The fourth case, in particular, is an emotional high point for the series (I won't spoil it), and on the whole the cases are quite a bit darker than before. The game is still just as funny as ever when it wants to be though, with characters spouting out all number of bizarre culture references. All the new and returning characters are as entertaining and compelling as ever, with the standout being new prosecutor Godot, the coffee swilling, goggle-wearing lawman with an intense vendetta against our hero. The way his story and character develop, right through to the game's fantastic ending, makes Godot easily the highlight of the game. Phoenix Wright 3 is good enough to convince the fans to buy Apollo Justice, but the series will have to work and mix things up a bit to keep the players interested for an entire extra trilogy. If you're a fan of the first two though, it's an obvious purchase. ((

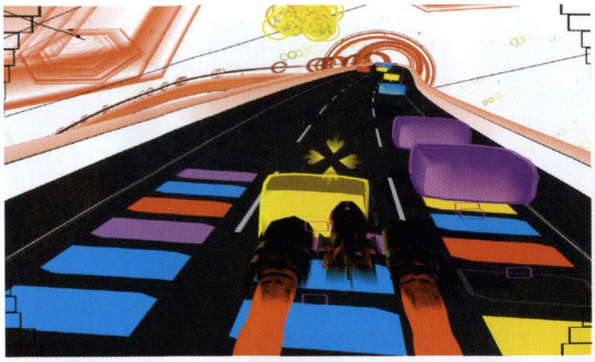
Godot, fantastic conclusion.

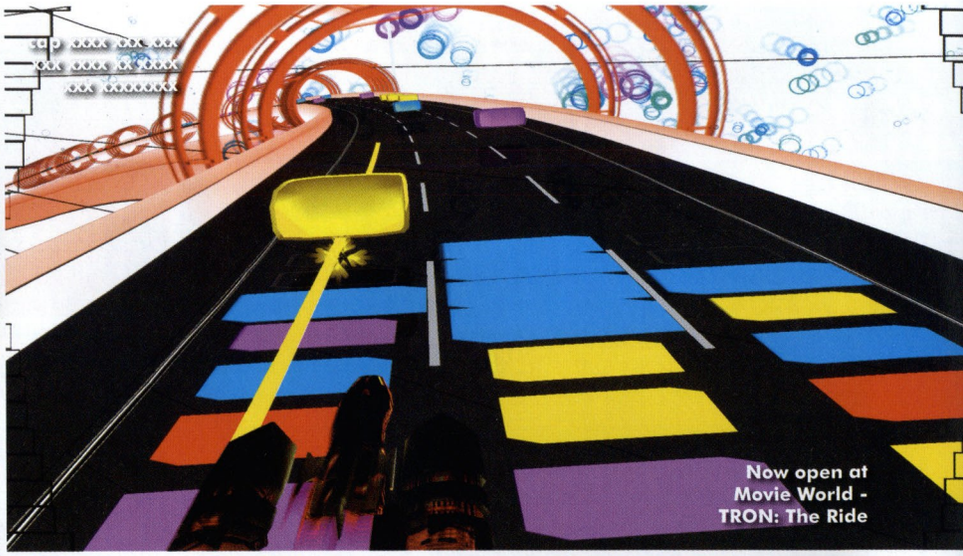
Nothing new, gameplay wise.

HYPER VERDICT

We only have a few objections to- wait...dammit!

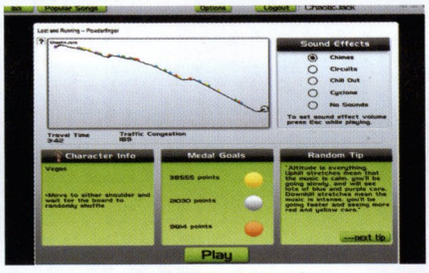
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	88	80	**80**

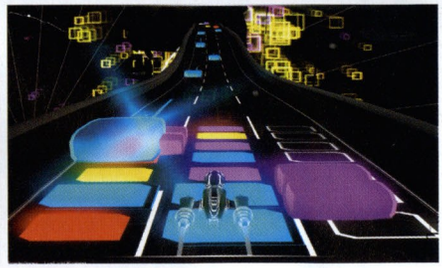




Audiosurf comes with The Orange Box soundtrack as a bonus, meaning – yes! – you can play Portal's "Still Alive"!

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





Audiosurf

DARREN WELLS rides the musical wave

Audiosurf will mess with your brain. You'll be listening to your MP3 player and making mental notes of how each track sounds. You'll scour your CD collection for songs, new and old. You'll browse online forums looking for song recommendations by other players. You'll think in musical beats. You'll see that technohighway in your sleep. And so it goes.

category: **Pidgeonhole avoider**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Dylan Fitterer**
publisher: **Valve**
price: **$US9.95** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now**

PLAY TO THE MUSIC

This is a game where, literally, you'll only get out what you put in. And what you put in is only limited by how much music you own. Select a song from your computer – MP3s, M4As, WMAs, CDs and OGGs are all supported – and you're plonked onto a three-lane road where you control a futuristic craft towing an empty grid. In each lane are various coloured gems; simply run into them and they'll slot into the grid. Higher values are attributed to "hotter" colours like red and yellow as opposed to cool ones like blue and purple, and when you match three or more gems of a colour, the points start rolling in.

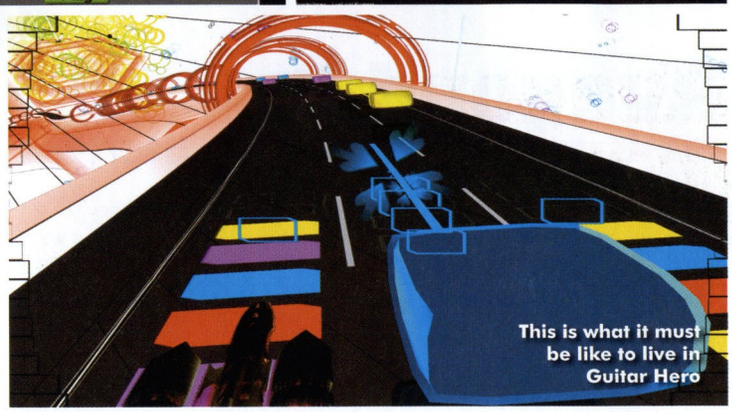
This all happens with your song playing in the background, but it's much more than just a backing track. See, every aspect of the gameplay is generated by the audio, which affects everything from the speed of the track, to its layout, to the gem placement and colour frequency.

Much like Vib Ribbon in 1999, the song dictates the experience – throw in some thrash metal and prepare for a loop-filled hyperkinetic dash, but a nice slow guitar melody will set things at a more sedate pace.

A number of game modes mix things up throughout the three difficulty levels. There's Vegas, where time in the track's shoulder will randomly shuffle any collected gems, perhaps resulting in some new matches if you're lucky enough. Or there's Eraser, where holding down the left mouse button before hitting a colour will delete any collected gems of that colour, freeing up some space in your grid. Each mode's gameplay shift has its own pros and cons. Do you spend time in the shoulder where you can't collect any further gems, or stay on track and hope for the best? Do you really want to delete those green gems, or keep them and try to net some points? There's a surprising amount of strategy involved if you want to make it on the leaderboards.

WE'RE NUMBER ONE

That's another aspect of Audiosurf: the constant drive to stay on top. Creating an Audiosurf account will send your score to the online scoreboard, putting your results against national and international players. Get pushed off first place and you'll receive an e-mail informing you of the fact. And just to make sure there's no cheating, a waveform thumbnail of each player's song is visible, meaning if it looks wildly different to how the song should be, you can report it for moderator analysis.



It's a simple yet engrossing concept. In fact, the gameplay is so involving that our only beefs are found in its presentation. It's an independent title, but Audiosurf straddles a fine line between polished and amateurish, with some screens – the tutorials, mostly – presented in images that bear the hallmarks of an MS Word screenshot, JPG artifacts and all.

The front end could have benefited from some tweaking, making it more user friendly when selecting songs. As it stands, each round is preceded by a file tree search of the song you wish to play – there's no quick-selecting from a list of favourites or recently played songs, and no way to search for tracks by artist or title. It's a bit of a shame more attention wasn't given to all facets of the game, especially in light of its digital distribution deal with Valve, but since the Steam platform allows updates to be delivered to customers in an instant, we're hopeful that some work is undertaken in this area.

The asking price is a steal and the gameplay will have you racing for hours. If only to support independent gaming, Audiosurf is worth a look. «

Great concept, addictive hook, numerous game modes

Occasionally amateur presentation, music selection interface

HYPER VERDICT

Give your music a new lease of life.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
86	80	82	**82**

An early screen from the unwanted Two Worlds 2

INDIE GAME REVIEW

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

Aveyond 2

TIM HENDERSON draws an arrow on his monitor's screen

!!! Ahriman's Prophecy has been available as a free download for a good while now, and while the visual resolution is low and the soundtrack trapped in midi form it easily stands as one of the better free games on the net.

There's a disheartening trend on the Hyper discussion forum, a habitual monthly ritual that threatens our words with a sense of inadequacy. People keep on requesting that all the review scores be listed. Perhaps those people, assuming they have actually done so, should be congratulated for reading this far in. But even assuming that every single person who thumbs through this magazine has stopped to read this review rather than just glancing at the final score, the undermining truth is that many of these people will still be able to decide if they're interested in Aveyond 2 or not just by looking at the screenshots. More depressing still is that most of them will be correct in their assessment.

WHERE IS AVEYOND?

So why bother? Well, because there are things that need to be pointed out – an evenly weighed measure of good and bad that will hopefully serve to inform overall expectations. Aveyond is a pretty decent game after all, and that means that it's worth a look even if there are numerous superior offerings out there.

As the third game in a running franchise (fourth if you count Grimm's Hatchery) that started out with Ahriman's Prophecy, Aveyond 2 is at least blessed with firmly set roots. Gameplay structures and a certain world mythos have been established at this point, and in many ways Aveyond 2 is a title that aims to bang out the kinks in the formula.

It does this quite successfully in some departments. The visual design is much more consistent that it was previously, and features more confident sprites walking around worlds that no longer feel like a random assortment of clipart assets. Obviously inspired by the high flyer RPG's of the 16-bit console era, it exudes an amount of cutesified anime charm, and character portraits actually feel stylistically appropriate this time around. The quality of the soundtrack itself is largely unchanged, but that's hardly a complaint considering the professional standard of that found in the original Aveyond.

Annoyingly, while the presentation has received a great overhaul that has managed to sacrifice none of Aveyond's simplistic allure, the game mechanics themselves feel unchanged, for both better and worse. Monsters can again be seen wandering the play area, and at the end of combat their bloodied remains must be searched for rewards. It's also possible to save at any time. Unfortunately, the difficulty remains unbalanced, relying always on the acquisition of new weapons that do far more to increase your odds of survival than any amount of tedious leveling ever will. The story balances several strands without collapsing in upon itself, but quest instructions are often arbitrary, and the quality of the writing itself is reminiscent of Final Fantasy fanfiction.

But Aveyond 2 can still be lazy, easygoing fun. If you're on the market for a straightforward bit of questing, and don't mind if the quest itself seems poorly focused at times, they you could do a lot worse. That is, unless you hate everything to do with Japanese RPG's and the Western ones that aspire to be like them. «

category: **RPG** / players: **1**
developer: **Amaranth Games**
publisher: **Amaranth Games**
price: **$23.58** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now**

[below] All this screen is missing is Charlie the unicorn

Cute; accomplished musical score; consistent visual design

Um, where was that next town again?

Has nostalgic charisma, but could benefit from a better sense of direction.

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
70	84	70	75

THE SIMS 3 Back in the 'hood: THE ANNOUNCEMENT, THE GAMEPLAY, THE SHOCK!
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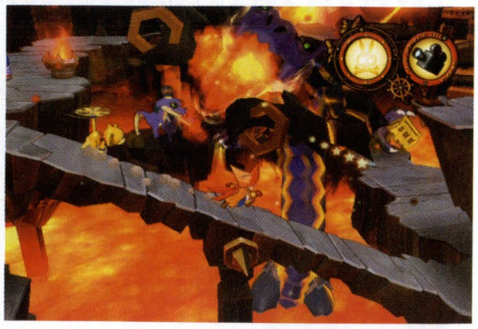


Zack & Wiki

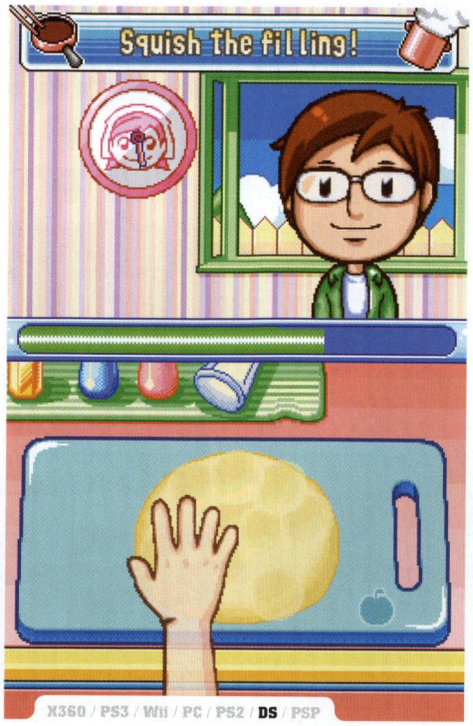
category: **Puzzle**
players: **1**
developer: **Capcom**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **$99.95**
rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

The Wii is perferctly suited to the adventure game. It has a control scheme that takes all the point and click accuracy of a mouse plus some extra motion sensing and adds the delightful "sitting on the couch" element lacking from most PC setups. Zack & Wiki is, simply put, one of the best adventure/puzzle games you'll play in a long while. Players take the role of young Zack, determined to become the best pirate ever. To do this he must find all the parts of Barbaros' skeleton...or some such nonsense. The plot really isn't important. What is important is the fiendish fun complexity of the puzzles and the excellent use of motion sensing. Rather than controlling Zack in a traditional sense, Zack & Wiki falls back on a traditional point and click approach to tell the characters where to go, what to look at and what to pick up, giving a kind of old-school pixel hunting thrill. Manipulation of objects utilises the motion control in an amazingly intuitive way - if you want to shake a tree, grab the tree and hold the Wiimote as if it were a trunk and shake away, thread a worm on a fishing hook by miming the action with the Wiimote. All of the pushing, pulling, twisting and what have you in the game is accomplished by performing those actions. It feels and plays fantastically. Unfortunately the game does have a few niggles. The story is mostly told through expository text, making it feel like a cheat and when there is voice acting it's pretty dire. The game also only runs at 30 frames a second and chugs when the screen gets busy. Still, Zack & Wiki is a treat for adventure/puzzle game fans and a real testament to the joy the Wii can bring.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
81	80	90	88



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

Cooking Mama 2

category: **Arcade**
players: **1-4**
developer: **505 Games**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **$69.95**
rating: **G**
available: **March 27**

While we wait for Iron Chef to hit the Wii (yes, it's happening!), here's another serving of Cooking Mama on the DS. It should come as no surprise to learn that it's essentially the same game as before, now with more dishes and a sliver of multiplayer, but if we left things there this review would be very short indeed. So let's go in for the taste test.

Cooking Mama 2 presents a "player see, player do" situation for each step involved in cooking a range of dishes. The concept is a natural fit for the touchscreen of the DS, as it makes the process a much more tactile one – just as it is in real life – rather than filtering it through a D-pad and buttons. The stylus is used for everything from cutting up vegetables, to filleting eel, to adjusting the stove temperature. While it's somewhat conceivable that one might learn some extra skills in the real-world kitchen, the main aim is to bring super-chef talent to the everygamer. A Guitar Hero for cooks, then.

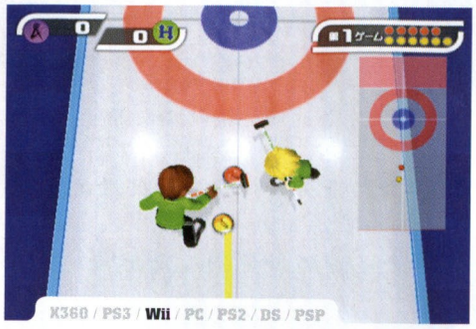
It's an interesting enough idea, but it's nothing that improves remarkably over the first game. The new range of dishes is fine, but the multiplayer modes aren't much to froth over. Mini-games do add an option for bragging rights, however. Will you be the fastest apple peeler on the block?

While it's unlikely to make a convert out of any Cooking Mama naysayers, fans of the original will no doubt give it a look. Just don't expect much to have changed.

DARREN WELLS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
69	65	70	70



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

Sports Island

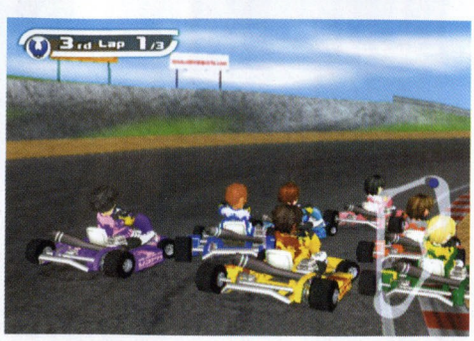
category: **Shovelware**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Hudson**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$89.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Sports Island is one of those games that are inevitably going to be described as being "a mass market game" and definitely not for core gamers. It's a game in the Wii Sports mould, giving players a chance to play ten different sports, either individually or as a series of events versus friend or the AI. It's also, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the worst, if not the worst game we've seen on the Wii so far. Each of the sports on offer is poorly designed and poorly chosen. Curling is really the only interesting game. Kind of like marbles, the player must push their stone into a target – the closest to the centre wins. The controls for this game actually work but we still wouldn't recommend it as a party game – turns take a long time so people will get bored and fast. The other sports are a mixture of bad ideas and bad controls. The Soccer game uses exactly the same command for passing, shooting and crossing, leading to no end of problems. The Kart and Motorcross racing is bargain-basement arcade racing with dull tracks and worse handling. Figure Skating charges the player with following a dotted line with the Nunchuck and flicking the Wiimote when they get to a coloured circle, the task made less amusing than it sounds by the fact that the skater handles like a cow on rollerskates. Badminton and Volleyball are essentially the same game, the only real difference being that the player has to flick the Wiimote a good deal less often in Badminton. There's also the problem that the game looks terrible and features a soundtrack that appears to be made up of a handful of 30 second musak/crap-techno riffs that are repeated ad infinitum. Do yourself a favour and give it a big miss.

DIRK WATCH

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
55	23	30	25



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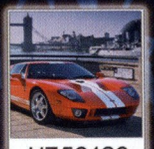
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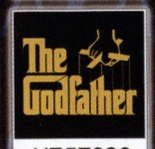

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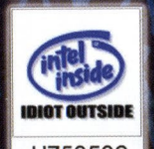

HZ53506

HZ56307

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HZ78904

Danni
HZ76375

Britney
HZ75978

Tara Reid
HZ78912

Jessica Simpson
HZ78753

Jessica Alba
HZ78713

Paris
HZ75984

Sophie Monk
HZ78938

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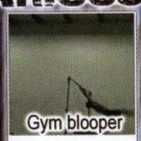
Little Kitten
HZ77608


Gym blooper
HZ77643

Plane disaster
HZ77622

Midget boxing
HZ77629

False takeoff
HZ77615

Car eats
HZ77620

CCTV
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Dynamite dog
HZ77649

where's my teeth?
HZ77644

MOBILE JAVA GAMES

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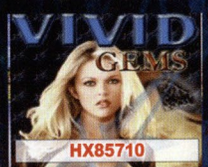

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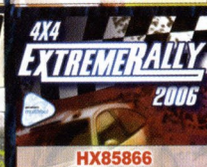

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NAKED CELEBRITY CLUB

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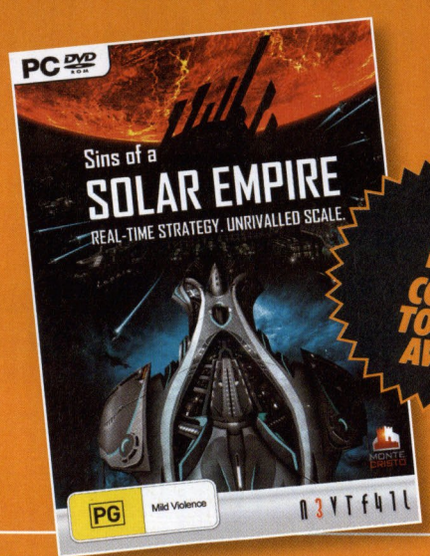
WinWinWin



WIN SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE!

10 COPIES TO GIVE AWAY!

>> Space is a big place, so it's only fitting that a space based strategy game is equally big. Sins of a Solar Empire is an epic strategy experience, delivering a fast, fun, and highly tactical gaming experience, not to mention a staggeringly attractive one. As far as strategy games go, Sins I one of the best we've played in quite a while so we're pleased to offer you the chance to win yourself a copy.

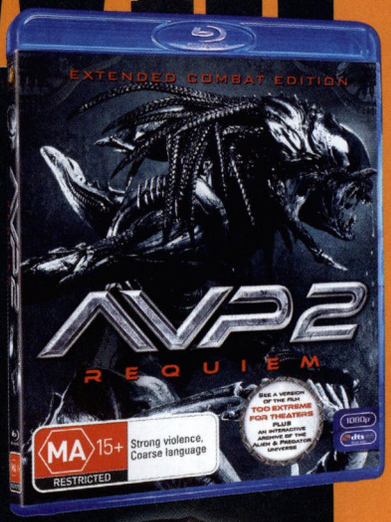
All you need to do for a chance to win a copy of Sins of a Solar Empire on PC is **tell us, in 50 words or less, what is the greatest sin you've ever committed whilst gaming.**

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

WinWinWin

WIN A HEAP OF ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: REQUIEM GOODIES!

13 PRIZE PACKS TO GIVE AWAY!



>> The Aliens Vs. Predator franchise has a long and quite rich history, spanning comics, videogames, novels and movies. To celebrate the launch of the second Aliens Vs. Predator: Requiem on Blu-Ray, the kind people at Fox have given us some pretty sweet prize packs to give away. One lucky winner will win a limited edition 40cm Predator figurine and a copy of Aliens Vs. Predator on Blu-Ray. 12 runners up will take home a copy of AVP2 on Blu-Ray, an AVP 2 cap and an AVP2 T-Shirt.

All you need to do for a chance to win one of the AVP2 prize packs is **tell us, in 50 words or less, which two creatures fighting would make a great movie and why?** To get the ball rolling, here's our suggestion for a great grudge match: Badger Vs. Manatee — a battle between a cranky burrowing critter and the bastard of the sea is a definite winner in our eyes.

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

1 MAJOR PRIZE WINNER
- 40cm limited edition predator replica $500.00
- AVP2 on Blu Ray Disc $40.00

12 RUNNER UP WINNERS
- AVP 2 on Blu Ray Disc $40.00 each
- AVP 2 Caps $20.00
- AVP2 T-Shirt $20.00

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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 April 1, 2008 and entries close at 6pm May 14, 2008. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am May 15, 2008 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners names will be published in the May issue of Hyper on sale June 4, 2008. 9) 1 Winner will receive a copy of AVP2 on Blu-Ray (RRP: $40) and a limited edition Predator figure (RRP: $500). 12 winners will recieve a copy of AVP2 on Blu-Ray (RRP: $40), an AVP2 T-Shirt (RRP: $20) and an AVP2 Cap (RRP: $20). Total competition value $1500. 10 Winners will receive a copy of Sins of a Solar Empire on PC (RRP: $69.95). Total competition value $695. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

EVIL BORN OR CREATED?

"RE-ESTABLISHES MR. ZOMBIE'S STATUS AS MODERN AMERICA'S MOST ECCENTRIC AND SURPRISING FILMMAKER."
– NEW YORK TIMES

R 18+ RESTRICTED
High level horror violence, Some sexual violence

R 18+ Restricted to 18 and over

DVD AVAILABLE TO RENT OR BUY NOW

DIMENSION FILMS

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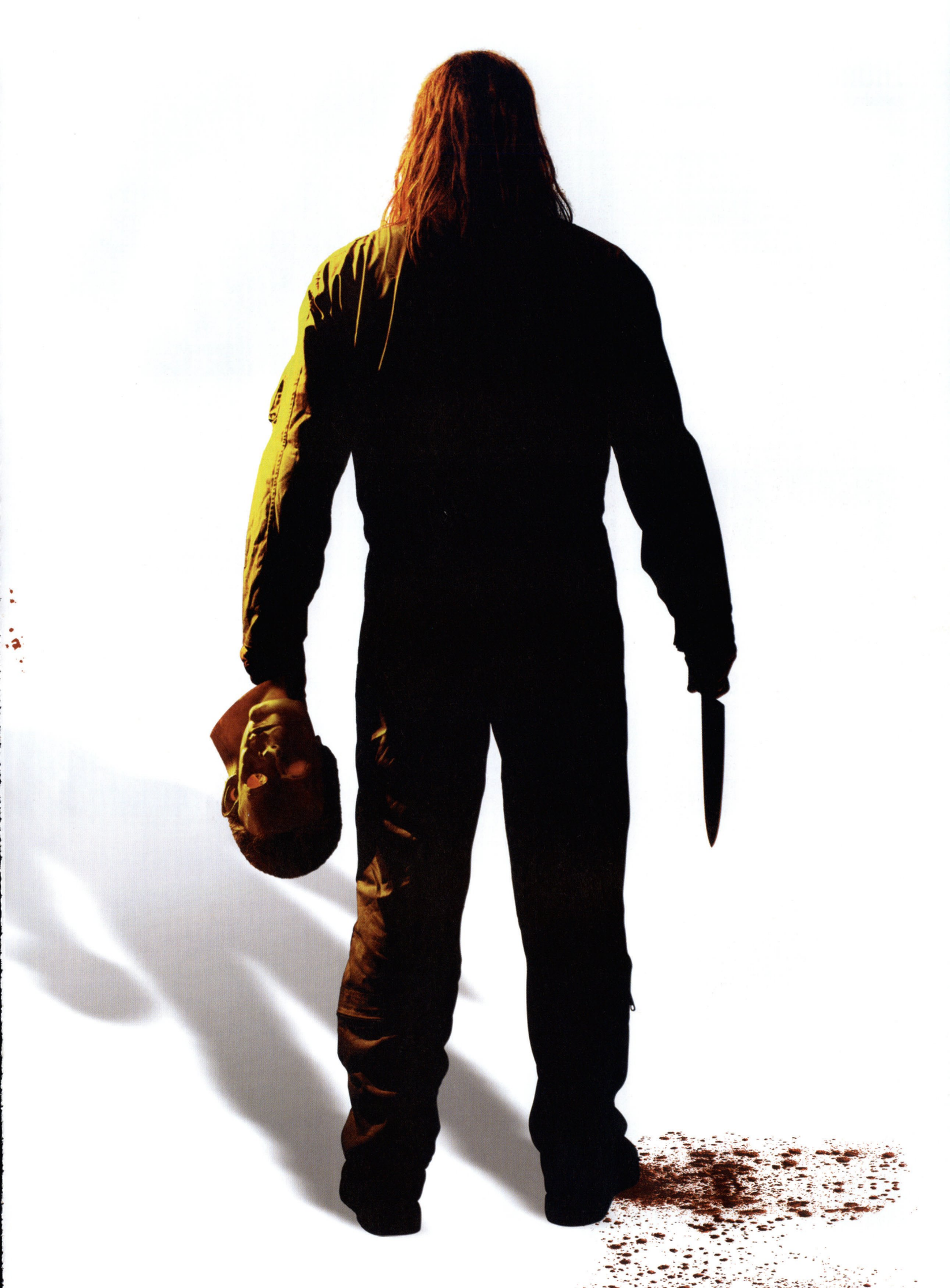
ROADSHOW ENTERTAINMENT

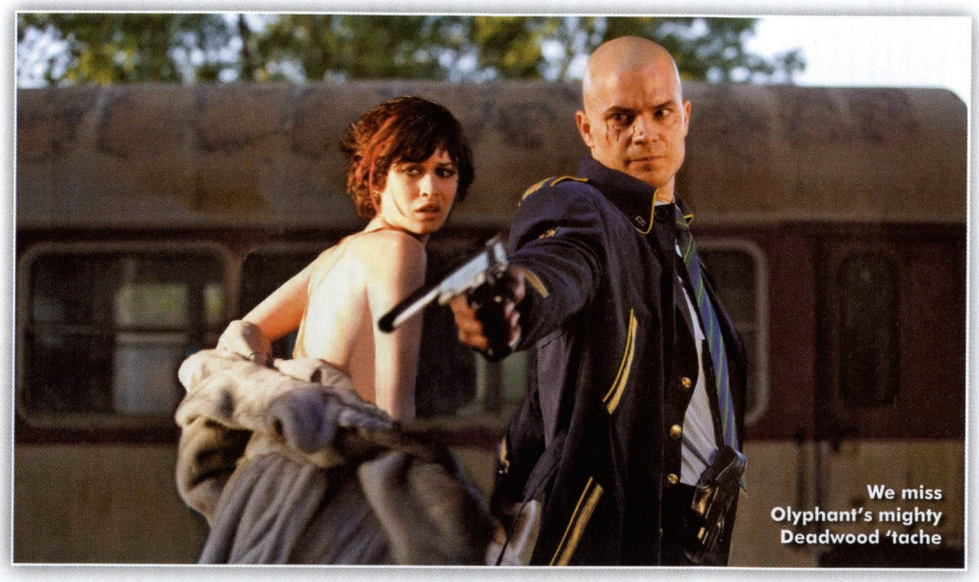


Hitman

20th Century Fox, MA

Say what you like about Agent 47, you've got to admire his confidence. Without batting an eyelid, the man can parade around with his supermarket-style barcode gleaming off his naked scalp, the phrase "self-conscious" apparently not in his dictionary. Unfortunately, when it comes to an assassin who must rely on an image not making an impression, he falls a tad short. The moment Agent 47 is seen waiting in line at a train station demonstrates this; one can only wonder what the woman standing behind him thought of his head ink.

If suspension of disbelief is required when watching Hitman, then so is suspension of brain. Too many scenes highlight the inherent flaw in expecting a barcoded baldie to blend in with a crowd, and others – filled with bad dubbing and wayward acting – simply reek of bad filmmaking. In between we're expected to swallow the plight of Agent 47 (Timothy Olyphant) as he unravels a globetrotting case of puppet politics and double-crossing, with an attractive female lead naturally in the middle (and as it turns out, by his side).



We miss Olyphant's mighty Deadwood 'tache

It's hardly untouched ground (see Jean Reno and Natalie Portman in The Professional), but pairing this autonomous killer with a member of the fairer sex does go some way to defining 47's character. An early scene has him politely excuse himself from the advances of a woman at a bar, but a later one sees him dealing with an intimate situation as only a pre-programmed hitman would: via tranquilliser needle to the neck. (Don't get uppity, he leaves her alone.)

Everything else is less engaging. Dougray Scott provides the cat to 47's mouse, as an Interpol agent who has to be the most non-smoking smoker ever depicted in film. He seems in a perpetual state of nicotine limbo, always with an unlit cigarette in his mouth, or removing a cigarette from the packet, or crushing a cigarette with his fingers, but never lighting up. If it's a deliberate quirk meant to pass as character development, then it's a bizarre one.

No memorable fight scenes. No quotable lines. No interesting characters. Oh, and all those shots that follow 47 like a certain third-person videogame get old fast. Even die-hard Hitman fans would likely find this film a tough sell, and there's certainly nothing here for the rest of us.

FILM: 4 / FEATURES: TBA

Rogue Assassin

SONY, MA15+

Cheese and vegemite is awesome. Banana and peanut butter is awesome. Jet Li and Jason Statham sounds like a recipe for awesome, but under the direction of music video director Philip G. Atwell, they're an adjective that's not awesome.

Rogue Assassin is comprised of the building blocks of every 80s movie ever made, with the razzle-dazzle photography and editing of a Video Hits marathon and an obligatory twist ending throw in for good measure. Jason Statham is the cop whose partner got shot, Jet Li is the mysterious assassin, and naturally, bullets and punches ensue. Actually, there's more to it than that: Li sets about turning the rival Triad and Yakuza gangs against each other, some antique gold horses are somehow important to the plot, and Statham speaks Japanese. Apparently.

It seems like money in the bank to pair off two action stars against each other. Statham has proved a worthy, if slightly grunty, contender, and Li has a list of martial arts movies as long as a bo staff. Indeed, the pairing did work in 2001's The One, a slightly silly but nonetheless entertaining romp involving kung fu and interdimensional travel. But here, neither star is really given a chance to shine solo, let alone together. Li turns in a performance that's almost sombre, and only really comes to life during the more action-oriented third act. Statham does his typical gruff guy schtick, but again, it's only during a not-entirely-spectacular fight scene that a spark of life is evident. Both actors just seem lukewarm about the whole thing, and when that's the vibe they present, it's hard for us to care.

Keep sharp - Uwe Boll is in here somewhere

Jet Li is as disgusted with the movie as we are

Although the music video style of Atwell is expected, it's grating. It gets in the way. Too-slick lighting, rapid-fire jump cuts and all your token music video shots are constantly pushed forth, and don't serve the story at all. Things look bleak until the final third of the movie goes for broke, and while the effort is appreciated, it's too little too late. Action aficionados, don't worry. You're not missing anything here.

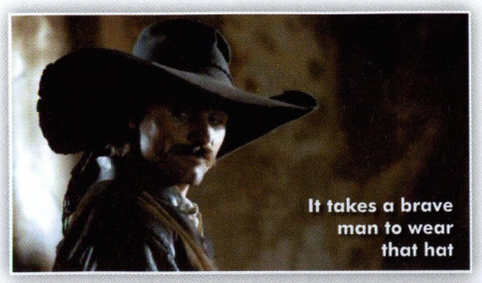
FILM: 4 / FEATURES: N/A

Alatriste

Madman, M

Don't be fooled - this doesn't happen often

You can't ever accuse Viggo Mortensen for resting on his laurels. After the phenomenal box office success of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the rental success of the patchy but fun Hidalgo and the critical success of A History of Violence, Mortensen decided, rather improbably to head to Spain and star in a Spanish speaking movie about a noble soldier, Alatriste, caught up in the fall of the Spanish empire, a difficult affair, the dealings of corrupt superiors, the fear of the Inquisition and the underlying fear that the end of the Spanish domination f the world may soon be over.


It takes a brave man to wear that hat

At first glance Alatriste appears to be somewhat akin to the Sharpe stories – featuring similar honourable soldier heroes caught up in events bigger than them, but whereas the Sharpe films direct themselves towards action and intrigue, Alatriste bears a rather uncomfortably episodic structure that can see the hero taking part in a rather rousing battle only to come home and involve himself in some rather tepid tragic/romantic meandering.

Mortensen does the best he can with the rather underwritten part but there's not a lot he can - work with. A man of few words, many scenes see Alatriste standing all but silently as other characters talk around him, delivering exposition that could have been put to better use fleshing out the character and giving the audience something to hold on to. The other actors aren't in a much better boat, with characters that are either relegated to two dimensional villains or simpering love interests.

Alatriste is a great looking film with some brilliant costuming and sets and the occasional inspired shot but overall it's a patchy experience with few hooks to grab the audience.

FILM: 6 / FEATURES: N/A

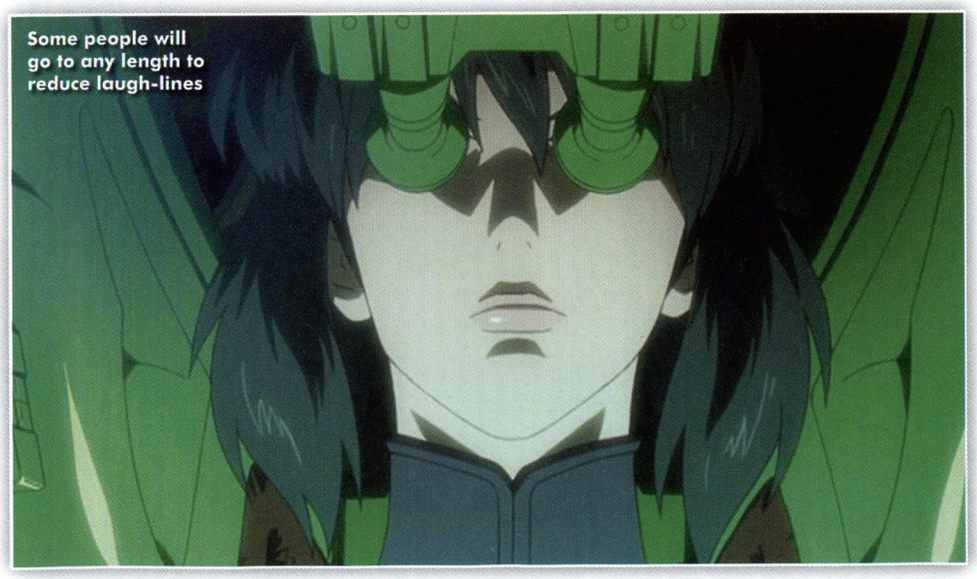
Ghost in the Shell S.A.C. 2nd GIG: Individual Eleven

Madman, M

And the award for this issue's longest DVD title goes to Batou and the crew. So in order to be nice to the planet and save our precious ink reserves, let's henceforth refer to this by its acronym, GITSSAC2GIE. There, that's better.

This is the film equivalent of a uni cram session. Just as The Laughing Man was a feature-length re-edit of the first season, Individual Eleven is the second season of Stand Alone Complex edited into a feature-length movie. And in case you're wondering how much a season can be squished down, the answer is "only slightly": it's 15 minutes shy of three hours.

Compared to watching each episode back-to-back, it is admittedly a far more streamlined session. Yet it's this very detail that raises one question: what audience is Individual Eleven targeting? True fans of S.A.C. will no doubt want the entire season rather than a pared-down re-edit, and let's face it, throwing newcomers cold into a nearly-three-hour movie isn't really the best of introductions. Who's left... completionists? Hardcore fans with a "gotta buy 'em all" mindset? Perhaps.

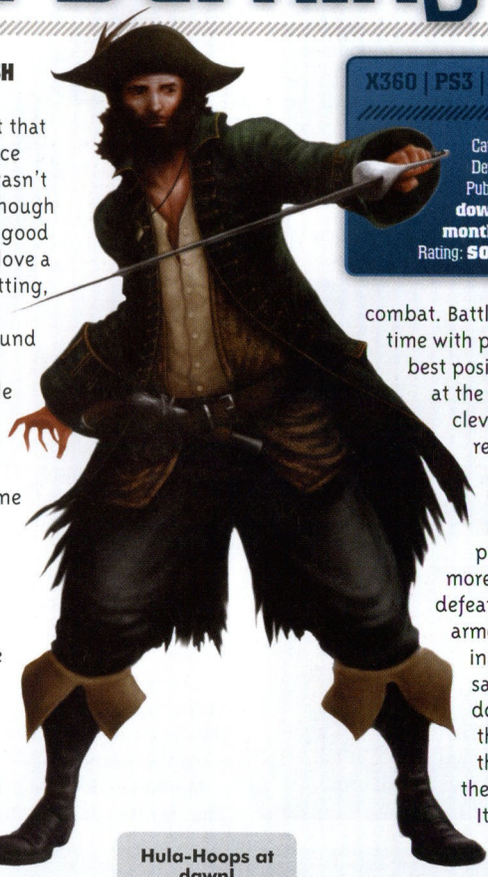

Some people will go to any length to reduce laugh-lines

Still, the feature itself is worth a look. Crisp animation and great art direction is present throughout, and some spectacular set-pieces, such as the Tachikoma rooftop chase, make for some engaging viewing. However, some dialogue-heavy scenes do drag on, presumably because their importance to the plot could not afford them any opportunity for re-editing. They may be okay in their original form, but the lag does show in the movie.

We'll say it again: Individual Eleven seems akin to swotting for an exam the night before heading to an anime convention. So if you positively absolutely need to know about the second season of Stand Alone Complex as quickly as humanly possible, this is your stop.

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 7 / **OVERALL: 8**

Pirates of the Burning Sea



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

Category: **MMO** • Players: **1-lots**
Developer: **Flying Lab**
Publisher: **SOE** • Price: **Free to download in Australia, $14.95 monthly subscription fee**
Rating: **SOE** • Available: **Now**

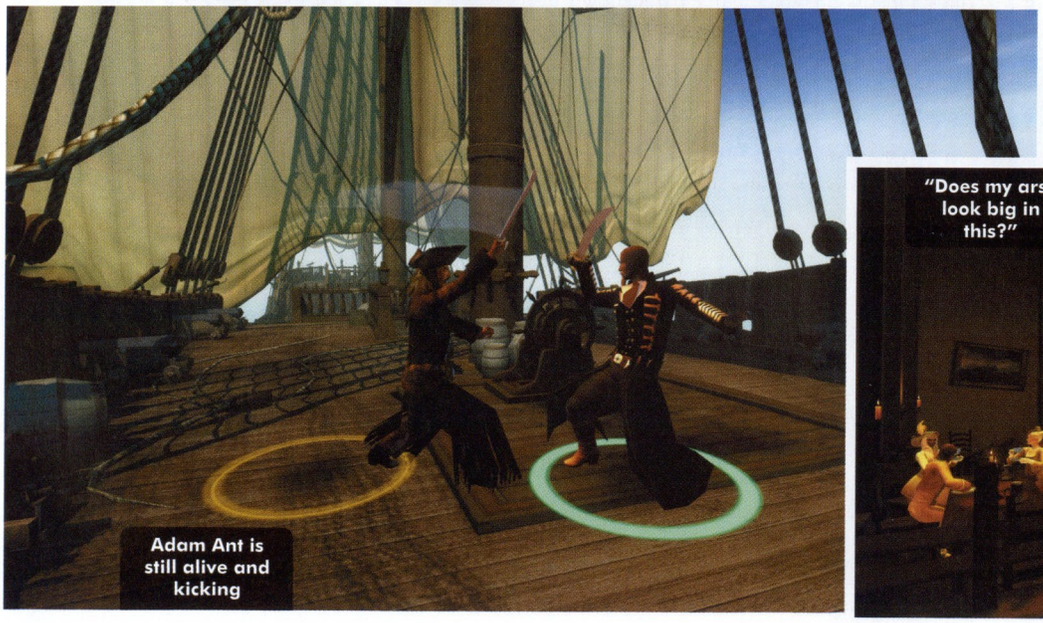
As terrible and lazy as it sound, it's all but impossible to talk about any MMO on the market without referring back to World of Warcraft. The MMO juggernaut is the elephant in the room that no developer seems to want to talk about, aside from when making grand claims that their game will be a "WoW killer". The influence of WoW can be seen everywhere in pretty much every modern MMO. The HUD has been ripped off holus-bolus by numerous games, as has the simple control system. Hell, even the distinctive visual style has crept into subsequent releases. Flying Lab, the developers of the nautical themed Pirate of the Burning Sea aren't at all ashamed to admit that their game has been heavily influenced by World of Warcraft. What's interesting to note is that whereas the lion's share of developers have seen fit to emulate WoW looking for a hint of that phenomenal success, Flying Lab have taken a different route. The influence WoW has had on them has resulted in a game that is, consciously, nothing like World of Warcraft. Flying Labs have gone out of their way to create a game that is nothing like the Blizzard monster, and is all the better for it.

CAPTAIN PUGWASH IT AIN'T

We have to admit that our first experience playing Pirates wasn't that positive. Although the game looked good and you have to love a good piratical setting, early gameplay revolves a lot around grinding and performing simple fetch, kill or carry quests. Combined with the fact that Flying Lab have done a pretty terrible job of actually documenting mechanics and guiding players to all the good stuff to be found in the game, from naval combat, capturing ports and trading. Being a huge geek, Wilks decided to take the trading route, buying and selling wares and generally amassing a fortune. Typical. He could have decided to take a military route and engaged in naval combat using the rather excellent real time combat engine but no, he decides to go and play with spreadsheets.

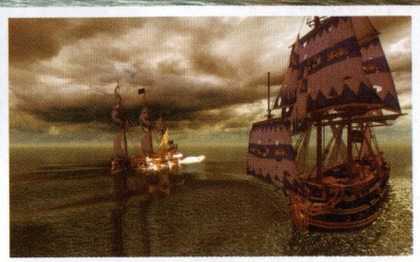
Naval battles make up the bulk of the combat. Battles are fought in real time with players vying for the best position to fire a broadside at the enemy. It's a very clever combat system as it rewards players playing well more than it does how well your ship has been outfitted. It's quite possible for a player with more experience and skill to defeat a much more heavily armed and armoured ship in combat through clever sailing. The melee combat doesn't fare as well but that is more the fault of the documentation than the actual combat engine. It's actually possible to pull off long and interesting combos in

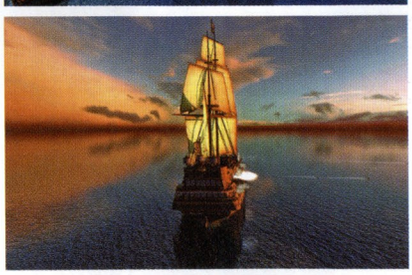
Hula-Hoops at dawn!



Adam Ant is still alive and kicking

"Does my arse look big in this?"





"For the last time - I've got no f**king crackers!"

> As it stands Pirates sits alone in its own little niche

melee but it takes a lot of practise. Flying Lab have stated that this is an area they will be looking into in future content updates to make melee combat more accessible to the average player.

COMBAT ACCOUNTANTS

Although we've yet to experience a real port assault, we were pleased to discover that all aspects of play are vital for an attack to succeed. Even Wilks' frilly-shirted accountant can play a vital role in a siege, using his trading proves to destabilise the economy of the region, opening it up to civil strife, making it easier for the combative players to overcome the local resistance.

From a purely aesthetic point, Pirates of the Burning Sea is quite an attractive game, and the good looks go beyond some stunning water effects. Although there isn't much in the way of customisation in characters aside from sex, height and face, there are literally thousands of items of clothing giving rise to millions of costume permutations. While many other MMOs can boast as many items of clothing, Pirates of the Burning Sea is more of a skill based game than a gear based game, so you won't see a bunch of characters wearing the same clothes and wielding the same weapons because they are the best loot available. Players are also able to colour their clothing, giving rise to many individual looks.

RENOVATIONS

The port towns and home cities in Pirates are quite nice to look at as it stands, but Flying Lab is not content with what they have launched with and are methodically going back and rebuilding cities to make them bigger, more detailed and more fun to explore. From what we've seen of the new cities and towns (to be rolled out in free content upgrades) they look amazing and we can't wait to have a look around.

Pirates of the Burning Sea is never going to be a WoW killer. We know it, the market knows it and Flying Lab knows it. It doesn't need to be. As it stands Pirates sits alone in its own little niche in the MMO landscape and we're glad that it does. After a few weeks of playing it, we're sold on the idea, the mechanic and the world. With any luck the fact that Australians can freely download the game will make for a decent local install base. It would be good to see a Hyper pirate guild. «

Foreplay of the Burning Sea

Harvest Moon:

The art and commerce of selling digital turnips

»Mikolai

On paper, a game about virtual farming sounds utterly ridiculous. After all, who in their right mind would want to spend their time planting virtual turnips, dealing with hormonal cows and scraping together money for a cheese processor? Despite all that, Harvest Moon has proven to be one of videogames most unique and endearing franchises. Indeed, since first launching on the Super Nintendo in 1996, there have been 21 games released across numerous platforms.

According to series creator Yasuhiro Wada, the appeal of the Harvest Moon games stems from their non traditional gameplay. Or, as he puts it: "I think it's very gentle and friendly. These days there are other games such as Animal Crossing that bare similarities, but before there wasn't such a game at all. Perhaps that's why people identified so much with Harvest Moon, originally."

He's got a point. In a world of identikit marines shooting the shit out of each other and competitive online play, the relaxing nature of the Harvest Moon series sets it apart. The games provided an open-ended world that the player is free to explore at their own pace. And while you might be able to neglect your goat until it expires (and the RSPCA comes around), it's impossible to murderise your own character. Or anyone else.

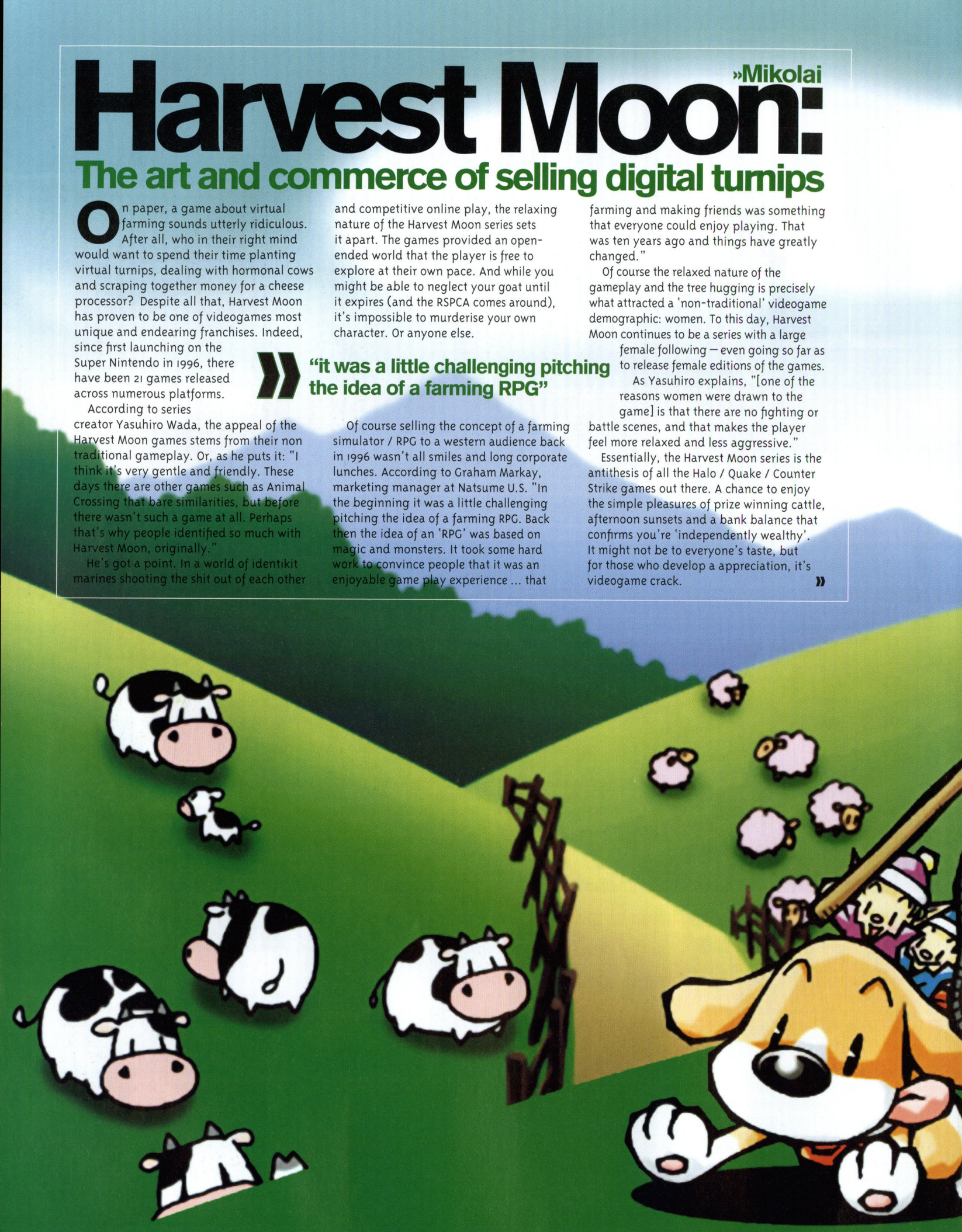
» "it was a little challenging pitching the idea of a farming RPG"

Of course selling the concept of a farming simulator / RPG to a western audience back in 1996 wasn't all smiles and long corporate lunches. According to Graham Markay, marketing manager at Natsume U.S. "In the beginning it was a little challenging pitching the idea of a farming RPG. Back then the idea of an 'RPG' was based on magic and monsters. It took some hard work to convince people that it was an enjoyable game play experience ... that farming and making friends was something that everyone could enjoy playing. That was ten years ago and things have greatly changed."

Of course the relaxed nature of the gameplay and the tree hugging is precisely what attracted a 'non-traditional' videogame demographic: women. To this day, Harvest Moon continues to be a series with a large female following – even going so far as to release female editions of the games.

As Yasuhiro explains, "[one of the reasons women were drawn to the game] is that there are no fighting or battle scenes, and that makes the player feel more relaxed and less aggressive."

Essentially, the Harvest Moon series is the antithesis of all the Halo / Quake / Counter Strike games out there. A chance to enjoy the simple pleasures of prize winning cattle, afternoon sunsets and a bank balance that confirms you're 'independently wealthy'. It might not be to everyone's taste, but for those who develop a appreciation, it's videogame crack. »



AND THE REST...

Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness
DS. 2007

■ You're stuck on a desert island with your (annoying) family and have to build up a thriving town and economy that puts Nazi Germany to shame. Not easy when all you have is a patch of dirt and a bag of seeds.

Innocent Life: A Futuristic Harvest Moon
PSP (2007)

■ Oh look! It's the future and you're a robot boy. Neat! Now you just have to tend to this here farm to learn what it means to be 'real' human. Mind the angry volcano, if you don't farm good it'll explode and take you with it. A bit of a departure this...

Harvest Moon: Tree of Peace
Wii (2008)

■ The bestest looking Harvest Moon yet, this reverts to the graphical style of A Wonderful Life. This time round you're washed up on an island and given a block of land by the villagers – who have a thing for shipwrecked vagrants. Make enough money and you can buy yourself snazzy new outfits. While the Wii controls are rather limited – it's easier to just press the A button - this looks like a solid update on the classic Harvest Moon formula.

[left] Harvest Moon on SNES started it all very late in the SNES ife cycle in 1997

Harvest Moon
SNES.1997

■ Were you still buying Super Nintendo games in 1997? No, of course you weren't. The game that kicked off the whole franchise arrived ridiculously late to the 16-bit party and was released in strictly limited quantities in PAL territories. Nonetheless, it set the framework for everything that was to follow: animal husbandry, chasing the local women, planting crops, making nice with the townsfolk, leaving your dog out in the rain. Although sales were modest, it was a complete departure from everything else on the market and invented its own, incredible niche genre; the farming RPG. It's since been released on Virtual Console and holds up remarkably well for a ten year old game.

Harvest Moon
Gameboy. 1997

■ Your grandfather has been found face down in the river and you have to take over the farming business. If you don't get things up to scratch within a year the spirit of your dead grandfather will come back and give you a 'game over' screen and MASSIVE SHAME. Or something like that. This Gameboy adaptation is like a simplified version of the SNES original – minus the women. That leaves chastity or homosexuality as lifestyle options...

Harvest Moon 64
Nintendo 64. 1999

■ This is series creator Yasuhiro Wada's favourite game in the series. Probably because he was the one who had to sit their and write all the code for it until his fingers were bleeding. As he explained in an interview: "I was more involved with the everyday production and development side of things, so that's why I'm more attached. It feels more personal to me." The game received a significant graphical overhaul for the N64 and went from the overhead perspective of the original to a 3D isometric view. Other upgrades included a faster day/night cycle, more animals, festivals to keep you occupied and the ability to add extensions to your farmhouse. Sadly, the company managed to misspell its own name on the U.S. version's title screen – Natume anyone?

Harvest Moon: Back to Nature
Playstation. 1999

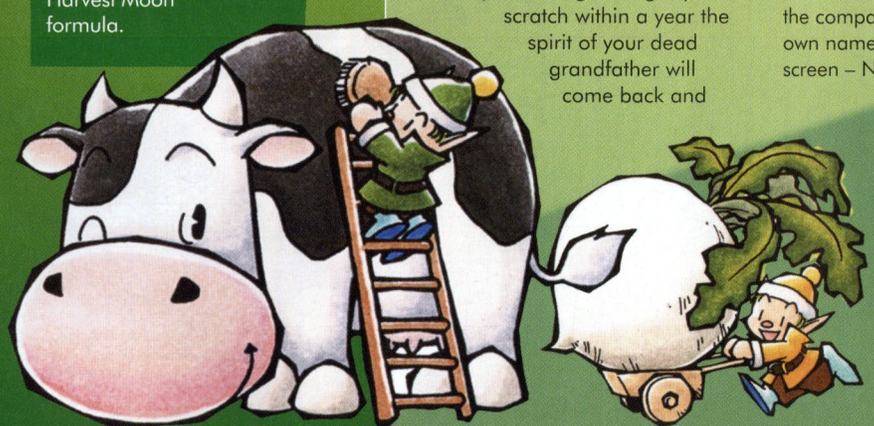
■ The first Harvest Moon game to appear on a non-Nintendo platform, Back To Nature features a new town and new characters – although the same 'dead grandfather' storyline is recycled and finds you inheriting a farm out in the sticks. Being a filthy Gaijin, the mayor of the town gives you three years to make good or he's gonna turf you out. In other words, being a jerk and ignoring the locals won't win you any love. Still, there is always the confessional booth in the church; some of the more 'colourful' sins you can confess to include: stalking a villager, drinking too much, shoplifting, and, coveting someone else's women. Just like real life then...

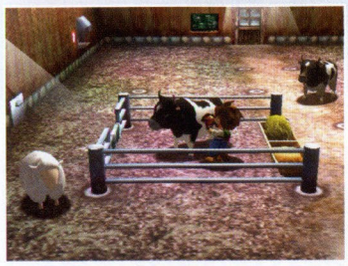
Harvest Moon 3
Gameboy Colour. 2000

■ A weird one, this. It's set on an island and you have to catch a ferry across to the mainland on certain days if you want to buy things. Mess up your schedule and you'll be sitting around eating dirt while you wait for the seeds, food, and emergency medical aid to arrive. At the start of the game you have to choose whether you're a girl or boy (the first western release to have this option), the game's storyline varies according to your decision.

Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland
PS2. 2001

■ An early PS2 title, this tried to take the series in a new direction. A plot of farmland is set to be demolished to make way for an amusement park and it's your job to become an 'eco-warrior' and save it. You're inspired to take up this lifestyle change after a visit from Harvest Sprites and a lost weekend in the country... Anyway, Save The Homeland features nine





[above] Harvest Moon on the PS2

Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon
DS (2007)

■ Fancy a bit of monster slaying, weapon upgrading and dungeon death alongside your farming? This is the game for you. For those who find the relaxed atmosphere of the series just a little too, er, relaxing, this is an attempt to add violence and murder to the formula. It works great.

Puzzle de Harvest Moon
DS (2008)

■ A Puzzle Game in which you race to plant and raise crops the quickest. Due out later this year.

Harvest Moon Online
PC (TBC)

■ Apparently someone, somewhere, is currently slaving away over this...

different endings. On one end of the spectrum you successfully save the farm and retire to a life of comfort and wealth. If things don't work out so great the whole valley gets turned into a giant carpark. Or something to that affect. Usually, you'll end up somewhere in the middle, get bored, subdivide your block for massive profits and fuck off back to the city.

Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town
Gameboy Advance. 2003

■ This is basically a handheld version of the PSone's Back To Nature title. If you have a link cable, a Gamecube and a copy of A Wonderful Life you can connect them all together and turn your living room into a nightmarish mess of cables and stepped on game boxes. Oh, and if you're a sicko, you can opt to marry the Harvest Goddess in this – rather than, you know, a human girl.

Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life
Gamecube / PS2. 2004

■ There aren't many games in which the lead character is destined to die. Get to the end of A Wonderful Life and that's exactly what's waiting for you. Death. This title marks another departure for the Harvest Moon series and is split up into 'life' chapters. As you marry, have a child and grow old, the game skips ahead until you end up, inevitably, on your deathbed. Still, if you raised your son right in earlier chapters he'll step in and take over the running of the farm. Do a half assed job and he'll probably end up giving strange men hand jobs in subway stations. Lovely 3D graphics and a focus on social interaction helped make this a fan favourite.

Harvest Moon DS
DS. 2006

■ Whoever did the quality assurance on this must have been drunk. The North American version of Harvest Moon DS is one of the glitchiest games around. Some of the 'surprises' you can look forward to include: characters you can't marry because someone forgot to include certain 'gifts' in the game, all the towns people fucking off to another village and baring their doors – leaving you in a ghost town, your cat and/or dog getting trapped by your home extensions and dying, horses giving milk (yuck), and other such weirdness. While a lot of these problems were (finally) fixed for the PAL release, the rubbish graphics and samey gameplay meant this was all a bit 'meh'.

Harvest Moon: Magical Melody
Gamecube. 2006

■ One of the busiest Harvest Moon games around. Not only can you buy land and plant crops virtually everywhere, you also have a (cheating) rival farmer to compete against, a wife to woo and 100 'Magical Melody' notes to collect to free the Harvest Goddess. This title reverts back to the manic work load of the N64 and Psone games and has you running around like a meth addict looking to score. None of this is helped by your rival, Jamie, who always wins at EVERYTHING because he's a CHEAT. Anyway, the graphics are a bit rubbish but the cast of characters is huge and you can have disturbing inner monologues about how your choice of (in-game) wife relates to your actual real world choice of girlfriend. This was released in the U.S. back in 2006. If you're 'lucky' enough to live in PAL territories (that's us) you'll get a Wii port sometime this year. Maybe. If they feel like it.

» Jamie always wins at EVERYTHING because he's a CHEAT

GETTING HIP HOP

How hip hop and videogames came

Throw on a new videogame these days and the first thing you're likely to hear is a hip hop track. Okay, that might not necessarily be true if we're talking space marines and 'magic' swords, but a significant percentage of games have wholesale appropriated hip hop culture and music. Whether it's Pharoahe Monch rapping about John Madden Football, Fiddy selling a glorified press kit or Lil Jon introducing Need For Speed, hip hop and videogames have become increasingly linked in recent years.

So how did that happen, exactly? Digging out our most murderous hip hop CDs and some old console hardware, we look back at the history of videogames and hip hop.

1991: Toejam & Earl

Sega (Megadrive)

■ Trying to win market-share from Nintendo, Sega opted for a more mature and 'edgy' approach to their games back in the 16bit era. By 1991 standards, a videogame featuring 'hip hop' aliens from the planet Funkotron was, to quote the Jerky Boys, 'crazy-stupid-fresh'.

1992: Kriss Kross: Make My Video

Sega (Mega CD)

■ This provided minutes (literally) of fun as you sliced together scenes from three different Kriss Kross videoclips to make your Hype Williams-esq masterpiece. It may have been bit hopeless but it was the first videogame to feature actual rappers – albeit, not very good ones. A Marky 'Wahlberg' Mark and INXS version of 'Make My Video' were also released. They also sucked.

1995: RapJam

Motown Games (SNES)

■ Have you ever wanted to play a basketball game in which a badly illustrated Queen Latifah dunks from half court? Didn't think so... From all accounts, this is one of the worst games ever released – the videogame equivalent of a Coolio Christmas album. Still, it set the template for future sports titles like the NBA Street series and bunch of other cheap knock-offs.

1998: Parappa the Rapper

Sony (Playstation)

■ Parappa not only brought hip hop to a mainstream videogame crowd, he helped popularise a new videogame genre – rhyme action games; also known as Bemani games. In order to help him rescue his girlfriend, players helped Parappa 'rap' by hitting specific buttons in time to the beat. Featuring a unique visual style and original hip hop music, Parappa showed that hip hop could be used as more than just the soundtrack to a videogame. The game became a cult hit and sequels were released for both PS2 and PSP.

» Apparently murdering hookers for cash is okay - graffiti isn't

1995: Wipeout

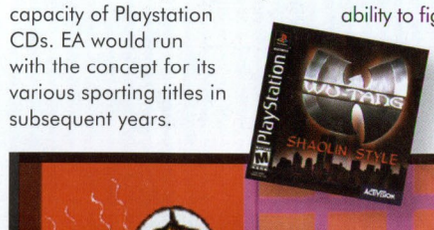
Sony (Playstation)

■ Although the soundtrack consisted of electronic tracks from the likes of Chemical Brothers & Daft Punk, this was the first time big name commercial artists made up the entire soundtrack to a videogame; something made possible by the storage capacity of Playstation CDs. EA would run with the concept for its various sporting titles in subsequent years.

1999: Wu Tang: Taste the Pain

Activision (Playstation)

■ Although some in the games industry viewed it as a cheap marketing cash-in (and a sub-par fighting game), 'Taste the Pain' was the first time a hip hop act had released a game based around their music and image. With exclusive new music (and the ability to fight as your favourite Wu member) this helped boost the Wu's bank balance considerably when it was released.



PAID

together to earn a buck

[above] Def Jam: Fight for New York - finally a game about kicking the crap out of Sean Paul

1999: 'Super Brooklyn' by Cocoa Brovaz / Smif-N-Wessun

Illegal download on the Internetz

■ While videogames and hip hop were getting cosy in the late 90s, Brooklyn's Smif-N-Wessun flipped the script – the pair wholesale sampled the theme music from 'Super Mario Bros' for the massively illegal and unofficial 'Super Brooklyn'. An underground classic, the track helped the duo land a deal with Rawkus Records.

2001: Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Rockstar Games / Take Two (PS2, Xbox, PC)

■ The first quarter of the game is basically a remake of every 'hood' movie you grew up watching: Menace 2 Society, Colors, Boyz N Da Hood, House Party and Mo Money. Wait; scratch those last two from the list.

2003: Need For Speed: Underground

EA (PS2, Xbox, GC)

■ Lil Jon's 'Get Low' became a worldwide #1 (including Australia) thanks largely to its inclusion on the title screen of this multiplatinum seller from EA Games. These days record labels scramble to get their artists on the latest EA videogame as a way to get music directly to the consumer and help shift 'units'.

2004: Def Jam: Fight for New York

EA (PS2, Xbox, GC)

■ Aimed directly at the hip hop community, this EA / Def Jam cross-marketing release featured a selection of the worlds most popular MCs slapping the shit out if each other to a soundtrack of club hits. Two sequels have followed and the series represents the closest marriage of hip hop and videogames yet.

2005: 50 Cent: Bulletproof

Vivendi (PS2, Xbox)

■ One of the worst games ever released for the PS2, Bulletproof still sold in droves. Perhaps the best thing about Bulletproof was all the additional content that came with the game. Sure, playing through the missions was torturous, but the amount of exclusive music, videoclips and general 50 Cent content helped sell it to the fans.

2006: Mark Echo's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure

Atari (PS2, Xbox)

■ Banned in Australia. Apparently murdering hookers for cash is okay - graffiti isn't.

2007: Def Jam Icon

EA (PS3, Xbox360)

■ The background graphics vibrate to the beat of the music and you can pull of combos by successfully timing your attacks to the beat. There are over 30 rappers to choose from. Unless DJ Premier learns to code and programs a game called 'Keeping It Real' from scratch this is about as close as hip hop and videogames can get. «

SHAQ FU

Super Nintendo/Sega Genesis • 1994 • Developer: Delphine Software International • Publisher: Electronic Arts

»James O'Connor

Hyper gets a lot of feedback from reviews of bad games. You, the reader, seem to love it when we rip into a really shitty game. Our misery, it seems, pleases you. Excites you in ways the games that are actually worth playing can't possibly match up to. It's because of this that I've landed this column, wherein I discuss an awful, awful game from the past with you. So, remember each month as you read of my pain, my anguish, the hot tears of horror that have literally (see: not literally) scarred my face, remember: you did this to me. This is all your fault. For starters, I'll be covering Shaq Fu, a game that features very little kung-fu and a pun that doesn't really make sense (replacing 'kung' with 'Shaq' isn't a joke, it's just...weird). Shaq Fu is a 2-D fighter featuring Shaquille O'Neal. If I was making a game about Shaquille O'Neal I'd probably make it about basketball or something, but then I'm a bit of a revolutionary. In the interests of truly torturing myself, I've played the SNES version, which is, reportedly, the worst one. The plot is about on par with a list of ingredients on a cornflakes box. Shaquille O'Neal, the gargantuan basketball superstar, is traveling to an all-star charity basketball event in Tokyo when he stumbles upon a kung-fu dojo. Inexplicably, he decides to go inside, despite the importance of his destination and no previous interest or experience with kung-fu. It could simply be that the presence of a kung-fu dungeon in Tokyo confuses him, since kung-fu is a term used for Chinese martial arts, but I suppose the developers didn't have Wikipedia in 1994 so we can excuse them for not knowing a single thing about the culture they make heavy reference to, right? The dojo master greets Shaq in a somewhat abstract way ("Greetings, big warrior! You are the one from the stars, I presume?"), before forcing Shaq through a portal to another dimension where he... actually I'm not even going to bother. It's a game where Shaq fights a handful of people and monsters for reasons not worth explaining. Also there's a mummy at the end of it.

one of the attacks is called a Shaqruken. This is, frankly, an outstanding pun

BASKET-BALLS

So, it's a bad fighting game, which is never pleasant. Aside from the amazingly stupid concept, this is a game that, predictably, features a horrific fighting engine and game structure. In story mode, the only playable character is Shaq, who is simply ridiculously outmatched by every single opponent he faces. While you're struggling to move (seriously, if Shaq moved this slow on the court he wouldn't even be able to make it back to the bench in time to get kicked off the team) your enemies are teleporting, throwing lightning around and generally pounding on you. Occasionally they'll just stand around in a corner and let you pummel them, but for the most part they won't take guff from no jive talkin' kung-fu wannabe. There's no real way to pull off interesting combos and your own special moves generally pale in comparison to those of your opponent. That's if you can be bothered learning any of the special moves, which is unlikely, because the controls are unresponsive enough to make pretty much everything tedious. Shaq's main problem, however, is collision detection, or the lack thereof. As opposed to real sportsmen, who regularly collapse screaming and clutching their ankle if another player so much as thinks about approaching them sometime in the next six to eight weeks, the fighters in Shaq Fu often don't seem to actually take any damage from, say, being kicked in the face.

There's standard multiplayer tournament and duel modes, too, which give you a choice between seven characters, giving you access to the guys who just kicked your arse for the full eight minutes of story mode you managed to stomach. This mode also confirms that, yes, all the other characters are much easier to control, faster, and have a much better range of moves. Not enough to make it a good game, just enough to make you hate the story mode just a little bit more.

WATCH OUT FOR THE SHAQ ATTAQK!

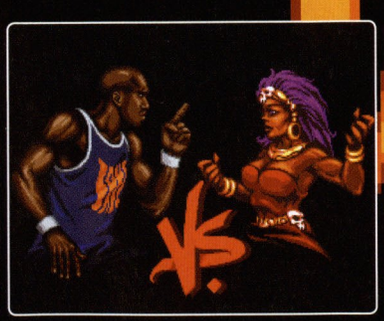
The game does, however, have two definite highlights. First up, one of the attacks is called a Shaqruken. This is, frankly, an outstanding pun. Also, the graphics are genuinely pretty decent at times. Animation is sound while character models and backgrounds are pleasantly colourful, even if the sprites are too small. In fact, in all honesty, I'd be lying if I said I hated every second of it. There were moments of the game where I felt a twinge of something that vaguely resembled fun - not genuine fun, but moments of gameplay that reminded me of something much better, sort of like the piss-weak cordial they used to serve up at school camp. Occasionally a fly-kick lands just right or a fight comes right down to the wire and for a second things look OK, but then your opponent lands a ridiculous move or your punches fail to connect and you're reminded, once again, that you're playing Shaq Fu.

All things considered, I feel as though I've gotten off lightly on my first scrape of the barrel. Certainly, it's an awful game, one that stood out from the masses of brilliant early 90s fighters, but it has some novelty value - it's more Shaqhouse than shithouse. Over the next few months, though, I'll be traveling deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness, until, eventually, I reach the edge of insanity and find myself staring back, tortured, anguished and pleading for salvation. Should be good for a laugh. Stay tuned. «

Oh, and the pre-fight dialogue is awful.

Shaq: *Be careful, prince. You might hurt yourself with those swords.*
Prince: *My swords will make you think twice about that comment.*

In all fairness, those two lines are still better than the lyrics to any of Shaq's rap albums. A copy of one of his singles from the album 'Shaq Diesel' actually came with the Genesis version, which I'm sure is an incentive if you can decipher lyrics such as "really yo you'd better ask MC Hammer 'bout this bad mama jama tall kid with the hoopa hypa lipta-gramma".



MAIL HYPER!

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SUPPORT UNIQUE GAMES!

In a letter titled 'A QUICK NOTE' in issue 173 the writer talks about the need for companies to start producing UNIQUE! games and stop producing rehashes and remakes. Hyper responded with a like minded response and talked about how if things didn't change companies would lose their target market. While I like these points the problem is that as games become more mainstream and big sums of money can be made from games fewer and fewer new ideas will appear. The mainstream market will want and be willing to pay for the tried and true tested ideas, knowing they will get exactly what they expect and companies will make the games knowing they will sell the games and make large amounts of money. Take a look at the movie industry, they churn out films based on the same basic ideas and its rare that a film will appear that stands out from the crowd. Films will also bash an idea to death until no more blood can be drawn from it - superheroes anyone? So it's not surprising that the games industry would go the same way. Just make sure that when you do see someone make a game that is good unique and different you support them by buying the game. Beyond Good and Evil is a good example, a great game, very unique in style and game play that was very well received by reviewers but did not sell well and consequently we never saw the sequel hinted to at the end of the game (a very big shame in my opinion). So support unique games and show creativity in our games is what we want.

Pegs

And on the other side of the fence...

SCREW UNIQUE GAMES!

This seems to be the standard thing to complain about among gamers: that the industry is constantly pumping out more of the same game, the same tried and profitable efforts instead of taking the time to create something new and unique. Everyone wonders why? It's so unfair and stupid, etc...

Well, I ask why not? Every other entertainment form has been doing the same thing for over a century with what we are seeing with the video games medium. There's a reason a new pop love-song comes out every week; there's a reason Hollywood chooses to make another two sequels from a film that only needed one installment; there's a reason Agatha Christie was able to publish over 80 novels of the same story with different character names: it makes money.

It is partly because of our inherent idiocy: our nature of being human. We like to stick with what we know, fearing an unpredictable consequence otherwise.

Unfortunately, because gaming becomes more mainstream, we must expect the bad as well as the good to come with it. But there is no one forcing us to buy these awful games!

I believe I became a fully-fledged gamer when I got my first job, because then I could buy my games with my own money. Call this tight or smart, I consider my money to be very important: for every game I have bought, I have done extensive research to make sure that 1: it is a decent game and 2: it is right for me to then decide whether it's worth my money. Buying for the sake of buying seems to be a growing habit for every Australian. But not for me.

Nogaku

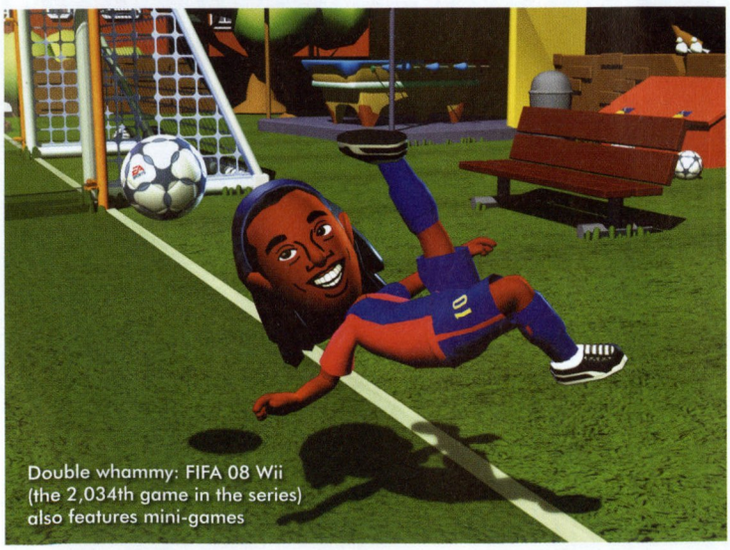
There's good points made on each side here, and it's a nice coincidence that we received these letters within two weeks of each other. It's also comforting to know that the issue is on people's minds, and does much to support the notion of the discerning gamer.

Perhaps human instinct does tell us to stick with what we know, but when you relate that argument to games it's important to consider the other factors. In our Emergence Mayhem review, Wilks contended that the reason Wii party games sell so well is because the majority of Wii titles are party games. With so many of the things existing, of course people are going to buy them, because that's all that is offered to them. Perhaps the same could be said for sequels and similar concepts. Fill your local EB shelf with sequels, giving the consumer little choice to buy anything else, and you shouldn't be surprised when they shift units. Like those Wii party games, it's very much a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Then there's the issue of games becoming mainstream. On the one hand, this does inevitably mean that titles will be created to exploit this fact, but on the other hand it doesn't mean that all titles will be. The PC is home to some of the most noob-unfriendly RTS, RPG and simulation games, designed specifically for the minorities interested in mini-managing WWII tanks or directing their submarine across the Atlantic in real time.

But niche or not, games often benefit from having mainstream support, simply because it affords better production values and bigger design teams. Juggernaut publisher Valve – although technically considered independent – cleverly combines a commercial business mindset with the innovation of basement coders. Case in point: Portal. Taking on a design team fresh out of uni resulted in one of the most clever mainstream titles available, and presented it in a manner that was accessible for

There's a reason a new pop love-song comes out every week



Double whammy: FIFA 08 Wii (the 2,034th game in the series) also features mini-games

Feedback

the_watchers_eye: **Odin Sphere makes me wish I had a PS2... Anyone wanna sell me their's cheap?**

Welcome back to the phone sex stuff on the back cover - I'm sure many 13 year old male readers will be thrilled.

pecka_a: **The thing that shocked me the most was finding out that both bioshock and Uncharted: Drake's Fortune where both on the wii and made by Nintendo.**

Princess Sakura: **Loved the Paint comics that accompanied the Superman 64 feature! They very much added to the atmosphere lol very funny**

Australian Ninja: **The mag was mighty slim this month, perhaps hyper is on a fad diet and has dropped a few pages. (count 'em). But what WAS there was all good stuff IMO, I really dug that weird games article by Mr Darren, possibly the strangest was the arcade game with the uh, no, can't even type it here - don't want to remember it. But it made me laugh that's for sure. I noticed in the mag credits there is two Daniels about and now a Darren. Three D's. Sure not to be confusing at all.**

Hotaru_oz: **I particularly liked the weird games article and curiousity got the better of me and I checked out Onsei Kanjou Sokuteiki: Kokoro Scan and watched the 6 minute trailer.....I can't get the damn theme song out of my head! Thank you Hyper and Japan for warping my mind once again**

TAT: **Just about the Superman 64 article: I loved how Jickle drew all these positives (free-roaming environ, etc) from what was clearly a woeful gaming experience. T'was certainly thought provoking: the mark of a good writer, indeed.**

the masses and appealing to the hardcore.

We agree that it's important to support unique games, but one must be careful not to throw money at a game simply because it doesn't contain a sequalised number or subtitle. Like Pegs says, if the title is genuinely interesting, then it's worth a purchase, but like Nogaku says, research before buying. Together, they are our path to weed out bad games and put the pressure on publishers to foster good games. Or so the theory goes.

NO TALK, ALL PICTURE

Gents,

I'd wax lyrical about growing up with your magazine (we'll assume your magazine has actually 'matured', even though at this stage it's still not 'legal' yet as you mentioned last month.) but I'm lazy. That & I'm sure the picture pretty much speaks for itself. Keep doin' whatcha doin' fellas. I'll need something to wipe my arse with (once I've finished reading it of course) when I'm old, incontinent and senile.

Cheers,

Spike

Alright, so Hyper might not be "legal" yet, but at least it's not far from getting into an M-rated movie without fuss. It'll still get hassled for ID, though.

That's a mighty fine collection you have there. One whole bed worth. Can anyone else beat Spike's effort? Perhaps we should have a competition for not only the biggest Hyper collection, but the most ingeniously presented collection. Hyper magazines pegged to the clothesline? Hyper covers serving as wallpaper (the old-fashioned kind, not the desktop kind)? Oh, the possibilities! Go on, readers, amaze us!

ZOMGMMORPGS!

Dear hyper

HELP im addicted to mmorpgs.

Many years ago(primary school) I was horribly addicted to runescape, I then discovered World of warcraft and played that for a couple of years.

Then recently I started playing Tabula Rasa, then jumped to D&D online hopped over to try some Hellgate for a bit before

Actually stopping on Fury(for now...).

Im spending my money on mmo-subscriptions when I need the money to upgrade my far outdated PC.

And know I turn to you Hyper.... give me advice!

the MMo-aholic

So you're the person keeping Fury and Tabula Rasa alive? For shame! We kid, we kid. Have you thought of buying a console? Seriously, if you're so worried that your gaming diet is consisting solely of MMO games, then invest in a 360 or PS3 – or even focus on a DS or PSP for a while – and see if time away from the PC can't curb your addiction. If you can't afford one, then borrow one, or spend time at a console-owning friend's house, explore his collection, and see what appeals to you.

Your habit shouldn't be too hard to break, if that's what you desire. It's telling that you're not addicted to a single MMO; you prefer to play them all. So it seems that you're at least open to the idea of playing other games, rather than restricting yourself to the comforts and familiarity of one lone game. A good sign.

The tip-toeing out of one's gaming comfort zone begins with a single step. Rather than jumping in the deep end, try checking out something close to the MMO genre. Think about something along the RPG lines – KOTOR is one of the finest in the genre, and can be had quite cheaply these days; perfect for your ageing PC! If you do explore the console route, be sure to give Mass Effect a look, too.

Let us know how you go, MMO-aholic. Gaming is a great hobby, and you owe it to yourself to enjoy its many fruits, rather than camping under the one tree. Trust us, you'll never look back!

CAPTION THIS!

It would be funnier if we couldn't imagine Eddie Murphy doing more crap movies in a fat suit, but thanks for the chuckle anyway
David Spier

Even with the shoot-to-kill 'Anti Fat Suit' movie ban in place, Eddie Murphy repeatedly tried to finish his Fat Albert remake.

RING OF DELIGHT

Hello Hyper and readers,

I'm writing to set the record straight. About a fortnight ago, my XBox 360 pulled the old "three red rings of doom" trick on me and seized up halfway through an Oblivion session. I nearly cried, as my 360 was purchased on launch and I wasn't sure whether it was still under warranty or not, plus I'd heard all these horror stories about how long it took to get fixed. A quick phone call, a bit of troubleshooting and I had all the info I needed to send it for repairs. Last Monday morning, I went to the post office, paid about $2.50 for a post-pak and away it went.

Yesterday (the following Monday) my XBox had been returned. It only took one week.

ONE WEEK.

All of the whinging and moaning I hear about Microsoft and how this shouldn't happen and that they're screwing their customers is all valid, because nobody wants to have wasted $700, and 3-4 weeks is a long time to wait. But I just want people to realise that they clearly try their best to rectify this largely unforeseen situation, and they even gave me a 1-Month Live card to make up for the time I spent offline.

Thanks MS! I'm still a customer.

Nerje

Your tale has a happy ending, Nerje, and it's great that Microsoft is making steps towards alleviating the problem experienced by many 360 owners. However, wouldn't it be even better if the problem didn't exist at all?

The red ring of death is a discouraging sign of the times, a symptom of the modern console race. Microsoft's 360 was the first release of the "next generation", and it seems that corners were cut with the design and manufacturing process just to ensure it got out ahead of the competition – the CPU solder simply doesn't hold up against the temperatures placed upon it. Sony's PS3 might have taken its time in comparison, but how many hardware faults have been reported? What oversights were made with the design?

Don't get us wrong, we're not poo-pooing Microsoft or praising Sony. We're simply pointing out that when one is not rushed, one can dedicate the time and resources necessary to making a device a lasting one. There have always been console wars, but heck, our old SNES and Mega Drives are still in perfect working order. We've still got Master Systems and NES consoles at the back of our wardrobe that only require a quick dust-off before they're ready for play.

Microsoft made a decision to go hell for leather with the launch of

Don't get us wrong, we're not poo-pooing Microsoft or praising Sony

the 360, and now – quite literally – they're paying for their haste. What is good customer service on the one hand is a rushed business decision on the other. Oh, to yearn for a simpler time.

GRAND THEFT MAGAZINE

So Hyper guys, what's the deal? You said you had an exclusive hands on with Grand Theft Auto 4 in issue 174 but what do you know, All of the websites had hands on before you and Official Xbox had a hands on about a week after you. If you ask me that's blatant false advertising. You shouldn't lie to your readers, especially considering the fact that you've been around for so long and have a lot of loyal readers like me who rely on you to bring us truthful gaming reviews and previews every month. Don't give the magazine a bad name.

Cranky Al

We're sorry guys. When we put issue 174 to rest we were under the assumption that the hands on would be an exclusive. After all, Rockstar told us on repeated instances that the feature would be an exclusive. We were told that we would be the only media outlet at the time who would have access to the code. The issue was at the printers when we were told that the major international websites would be running hands on coverage before we hit shelves and that Xbox magazine would be running a hands on a scant few days after our on sale date. We're about as pleased about that fact as you are.

That said, our coverage is still top notch and there's nary an outlet that can deliver the same locally flavoured information to the Australian gaming populace. Rest assured though, next time we're given an exclusive we will get it put in writing. Preferably signed in blood. If that deal is broken then heads will roll.

NOT LISTENING

No offence mate, your GTA4 hands on may be well written but I'm not going to read it. I'm a big fan of the GTA gaes but I screwed myself out of a lot of fun before GTA San Andreas came out by reading every single bit of information and preview I could about the game before it game out. When I finally got around to playing it I found the game to be real disappointing. Not because the game was bad but because I already knew pretty much everything that was going to happen all the mechanics and most of the secrets as well. I don't want to do it this time. I want GTA4 to be new for me so I'm boycotting all coverage.

Mark T

Wilks is probably crying himself to sleep on his giant reinforced pillow at the moment, but speaking for the rest of us, we understand where you're coming from mate. Sometimes the information overload can become a little too much when you want the experience to be fresh. Just a week or so ago, Wilks, a bit of a movie nut was desperately trying to avoid all sources of news, as he wanted to go home and watch the Oscars that night without knowing any of the winners. Hilarity ensued when just before leaving he received an email with the names of a number of the winners in the header. His scream of frustration echoed through the night.

It's a similar situation with games – how much information is enough. We strive to keep our coverage spoiler free, talking about the experience rather than the actual format of the game, level or mission. We believe this is the best way to deliver the maximum amount of information to readers without spoiling the experience for them when the game finally arrives.

TITS OF WAR

Is it just me or are the OFLC totally biased against Rockstar. I just played through God of War again while I'm waiting for Chains of Olympus to be released. That game has an interactive sex scene with tits and moaning. If I remember rightly that Farenhite gamealso had an interactive sex scene. Neither of them were banned by the OFLC. I reckon I could come up with a few more examples if I put my mind to it as well. So what's the deal. Did Sony and whoever released Farenhite pay the OFLC a bigger bribe or what or are they just stupid? Did someone at ROckstar piss them off? I want to know why the bloody Hot Coffe scandal was so bloody bad. Why was it a scandal in the first place.

Canticle

OK mate, calm down a bit. There's no big conspiracy going on. Even Wilks has managed to take off his ever-present tin-foil hat for this one. There's no bias, personal, political or otherwise at play here. The reason for the problem with the OFLC were not due to the actual sex mini-game per-se. As far as we understand it, the problem comes from the fact that when a game is shown to the OFLC, it's up to the distributor/publisher to show/demonstrate to the OFLC all of the material in the game that could be grounds for an adult rating. Our understanding of the situation is that even though the Hot Coffee content was locked out of the main game, the fact that it was still in the game and was accessible to the player but was not shown to the OFLC was what caused the problem. In the case of God of War, Fahrenheit and newer games like God of War: Chains of Olympus, the sexual content would have been shown to the OFLC at the time of rating.

Oh no! It's the OFLC!

Forum Talk

TOPIC: If I was a CEO

Flaps: **...I would set the background to everyones computers to crab.jpg.**

FrozenSoul80: **I'd water down the coffee, saving the company millions.**

Helmed Horror: **I'd settle employee disputes with exploding barbed wire death matches.**

Mike-Towns: **If my employees meet their quota: Bouncy castle installed in the office.**

If they fail to meet their quote: They have to eat a bouncy castle.

heatzor: **I'd get a shiny gold bar thing with my name on it to put on my desk, then throw it at people after I have called for them to come to my office.**

The Brett: **I'd randomly open and close production factories, causing tens of thousands of workers to endure crippling volatile employment.**

AranchineD: **Hire an assistant named Johnson, so I can continually yell "JETSON!" into the intercom and when he angrily replies for the 100th time that his name is Johnson I laugh and tell him that he's right, and that he does look like a Johnson, thus humiliating him with the same joke for the 100th time.**

TOPIC: Normal things you can't do?

cjj: **What normal, everyday things can you not do?**

I cannot tie shoelaces properly. That whole loop technique makes no sense to me at all, I have to do it like I am making bunny ears out of my laces and work from there. It kinda has the same result though. I used to get made fun of this so now I try not to let people see me tying my shoes in case they point and laugh at me.

I also cannot spit properly. Whenever I try to there is always still a big string of saliva that is attached to my tongue and I am blowing, trying to get it off but the longer it goes on for the more embarrassing it becomes.

It's too late for me to learn how to do either of these things but really it's not that big a deal.

What normal things can you not do???

Dorepoll: **Shuffling cards. Every time I do it we end up replaying the previous hand.**

RETARDS & PORN

I used to play a lot of online games but over the last six or so months I've found myself shying away from some of my favourite games. I'm not getting sick of the actual games. I'm getting sick of the players. I'm sure everyone has heard the sob story about the 12 year old retards in games talking smack and generally being dickheads. They piss me off no end but I've learnt how to deal with them. The people that shit me up the wall and have driven me away from playing TF2 are the f**king morons who think it's funny to have a spraypaint tag that's some porn picture or a snap of some guy holding his ass open. I like porn but that shit isn't funny. I report everyone who does it but there always seems to be another stupid prick around the corner who will do the same f**king thing for a laugh. It's not f**king funny. It's not

f**king clever. It just ruins it for the rest of us so f**king stop it!!!
4dv3nt

Calm down mate – you might pop a blood vessel. I know we shouldn't make a joke at your expense but while we were reading your letter all we could think of was Yosemite Sam from the old Looney Tunes cartoons, getting red-faced angry until steam shot out his ears. We know where you're coming from though mate. Griefers of all kinds are a pain in the arse. TO us they're the gaming equivalent of those dickheads who rushed to bookshops on the day the last Harry Potter book was released so they could skim read it and spoil the story for all the kids waiting in line behind them. Anyone who can't have fun without ruining it for everyone else should have their gaming privileges revoked as far as we're concerned. Of course, we have faith that none of our readers would stoop so low. Right?

TROMATISED

Did the cut scene kill games, or are we putting too much emphasis on storylines in games lately?
Games like the Half-Life series, The Darkness, and Bioshock seem to have obliged developers to try and tell a story with their games.
We used to pop into existance after Pressing Start, and only found out that there even was a princess to rescue after 4 levels. We'd pick one of 3 slipgates and just assume everything on the other side needed to be capped.
Now for some reason, we have to know everybody's motives and purpose in a good half an hour of generally sub-Troma quality writing before we're allowed to play the "game".
The same criticism can be made about the writing in Half Life and Bioshock, but it worked because the revelation of the story was a product of actually playing the game, rather than a diversion from it.
Take the story out of Half-Life and you still have a great collection of video game levels, take it out of Bioshock and the Darkness and... well its lucky they were stylish.
It seems that the successes of these games have given players, critics, and developers (or at least their marketing departments) alike the idea that a story is crucial to a good game. We're seeing less and less good hard levels, and more and more average games littered with terrible cut scenes.
Horatio Huffnagle Esq. III

We're going to have to agree to disagree on some points there mate. A story and difficult levels don't have to be mutually exclusive. It's quite arguable that Half-Life succeeded because of its great level design rather than its reliance on story and cutscenes. The game hardly has any story in a traditional sense. Players just pick up knowledge as things go along and the games are known for not relying on cutscenes to relay information to the player. Bioshock similarly relied very little on cutscenes, instead giving exposition through dialogue and audio diaries. The Darkness did rely heavily on cutscenes to tell the story and flesh out the world/characters but we don't feel as though this is a bad thing. Similarly we don't think it's right to say that without the stories the games would be average. You can't take the stories out of The Darkness and Bioshock – they are an integral part of the game. Ultimately I think we're seeing bad cutscenes far less than we used to. It used to be that the only way players were delivered any kind of story or exposition would be for the gameplay to stop and a canned video to roll delivering gobs of exposition. Games nowadays, we believe, are a good deal more subtle. And anyway, what's wrong with Troma films? Tromeo & Juliet and Terror Firmer are rad!

AGGRESSIVE

I'm more than a little bit worried about all these reports that EA are trying to take over Take 2. I understand that they're probably most interested in acquiring the brand because of the 2K sports franchises, givng EA the monopoly on the sports market but I'm more worried about their other interesting IP being consumed and turned into yearly iteration, lowest common denominator crap in the EA style. If they do take over Take 2 I reckon it's only going to be a matter of time before we start seeing games like "Mafia 3 - Mafia in the Hood" coming out 6 months after Mafia 2 and Bioshock 3 coming out a late 2009 complete with improbably celebrity voice acting, a chick with big tits on the cover and in game advertising. And don't get me started on what they'll probably do to Rockstar. They're bad enough already with their reskinned GTA3 every couple of years but under EA we'll probably see reskinned GTA IV games twice a year.
Guy Davis

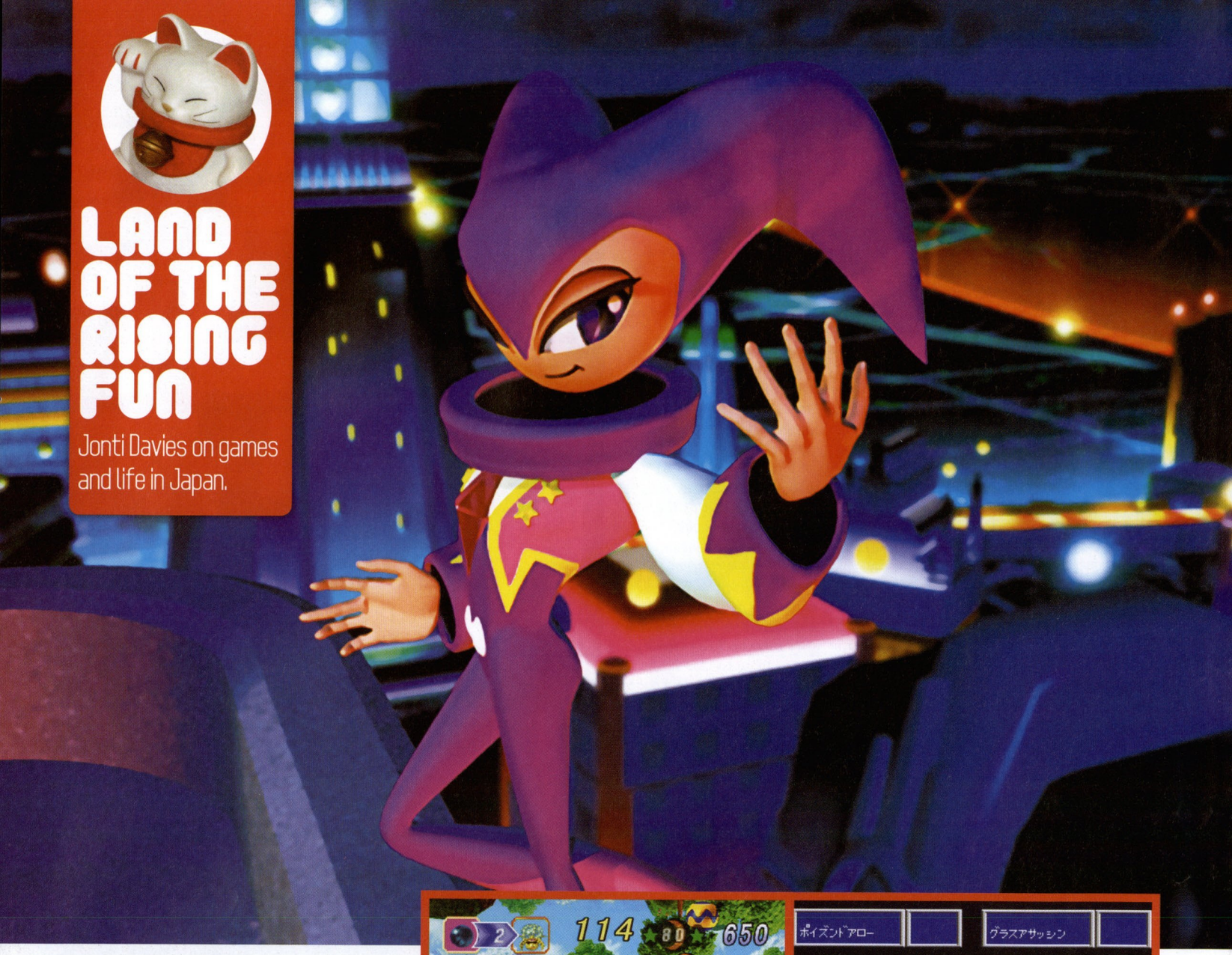
We don't think it will be that bad, mate, but we are a little worried about the yearly iteration EA style ourselves. Of course we could be wrong - the EA giant could mean that the smaller, more interesting titles will have higher budgets, but we're not going to get our hopes up.

READER'S TOP 50

» Ok dear readers, the time has come for you to contribute to the gaming edifice that is Hyper! In issue 178 we will be printing out Reader's Top 50, a list of games that you simply can't live without.

Naturally, we can't make the list for you so we need you, the reader, to chip in. What we need you to do is make a list of your top 50 games (or as many games as you can think of) along with a line or two for each game explaining why you think it's so good. Once we've received all of the entries we'll collate the lists and discover which games are truly the Hyper Reader's Top 50 Games.

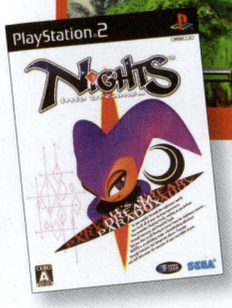
So get cracking and send your entries to Reader's Top 50, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, 2016 or email them to **freakscene@next.com.au** under the header "Reader's Top 50"



LAND OF THE RISING FUN

Jonti Davies on games and life in Japan.

Not pictured: Phantasy - or a star for that matter



I've been trying to collect the entire SEGA Ages 2500 series of PS2 remakes of SEGA classics, which are mostly exclusive to Japan (sorry), but we're up to Volume 32 now and I don't have infinite resources. So I've been selective, picking up the titles that intrigue me the most or that I know I'll love to bits. Each SEGA Ages 2500 release costs 2500yen, which is about AU$25. For that modest outlay, you can get all sorts: among the 31 volumes released to date are modernised remakes of classics such as *Space Harrier, Out Run, Virtua Racing, Dynamite Deka, Virtual On* and *Gunstar Heroes*.

Volume 32, which SEGA has just confirmed for release at the end of March, promises to be an essential addition to the line-up: *Phantasy Star Complete Collection*. And by 'complete', SEGA is talking about Phantasy Stars 1 through 4, along with new play modes and eight text adventure scenarios. Oh yeah.

Although not strictly a part of SEGA's ongoing Ages videogame archaeology project, last week I was able to pick up the Japan-exclusive remake of *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, which has also been ported to the PS2. It's turned out pretty well, but I was surprised when I got to the ending credits of this new version of NiGHTS to find that no members of the original Sonic Team were involved in the conversion work. Bizarrely, most of the staff on PS2 NiGHTS are apparently Chinese, so I can only assume that SEGA used this production to test the ability of a new Chinese studio. And if that was the case, I think it's likely that they passed the test with an A+.

Key to this new rendition of NiGHTS is its Brand New Dream mode. It's not really brand new – it's exactly the same game as appeared on the Saturn in 1997, only with greatly improved graphics. But that should be more than enough reason for fans of the original to 'upgrade' to PS2 NiGHTS. It's not like the original looks have merely been upscaled and anti-aliased, either; there's more to it than that. It looks as though SEGA's Chinese team have taken the game apart, examined each piece of the construction, built their own refined and more structurally complex replica pieces, and then reassembled the thing in a dust-free environment. Result: NiGHTS shines like a diamond and moves like the wind. Very impressive.

Unfortunately, while the technical overhaul is flawless, there are a few gameplay elements that have either been forgotten or deliberately dropped: most notably, there's no two-player game to unlock in the PS2 version, and no time attack either. So completists will want to hold onto their Saturn copies as well. Christmas NiGHTS is a part of this package, at least, although it's tied to the movements of the PS2's internal clock and is therefore only playable at wintertime. Which is quite appropriate, but a bit annoying as winter slips into spring...

COLLECTIONS

BY ERIN MARCON

Though he works in a business obsessed with discovering the next big thing, Wahoo Studios' Jeremy Throckmorton often draws inspiration from games more than 20 years old. Super Mario Bros. and the Legend of Zelda are two such titles. "Those games always seem to surprise me with how well they have aged," he says.

"Knowing exactly what makes them so enduring is, I'm sure, the question every designer asks himself, repeatedly, and continues to refine his answer to over the years."

According to Throckmorton, the success of these games can be partly attributed to the technical boundaries of the time. "At a high level these games owe a lot to a very limited and focused design instead of trying to throw in every possible 'cool' thing."

This is not to say that he has only been influenced by games from the formative years of the industry. When their turn-based war game Band of Bugs was still on the drawing board, Throckmorton and his Wahoo cohorts studied a range of titles, some similar, others far from it. "Obviously, games from a specific genre can influence your decision when making a similar game," he says.

"For instance, the slow multiplayer in Advance Wars helped drive us to look for a way to diminish down time for players in Band of Bugs."

"Seemingly unrelated games can have an influence as well. The Spider Hunter multi-player mode in Band of Bugs was inspired by a desire to create a quick-playing, join-on-the-fly game after we saw the awesome multiplayer in Marble Blast Ultra."

"Everything has the potential to influence the design of a game, and it's not just limited to video games, so it's not really possible to play a game and not be influenced by it in some way."

As a player, Throckmorton is drawn to RPG and action/adventure titles.

"Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver is a favourite of mine. The mechanics are simple, visceral, and tight. The level and puzzle design is top-notch."

"Fallout is another favourite, thought I've never been able to finish it. I just start game after game, exploring the wasteland and interacting with its inhabitants in different ways. I love how rich the world is, and how much the game changes depending on the character you create and how you play. Plus you can make called shots to the crotch."

With a collection approaching 700 titles, Throckmorton has given up on discovering a single storage solution. "I like to keep as many of the games as I can on shelves," he says, "but far too many of them are filed away in banker's boxes stacked in closets."

"Games for handheld systems are kept in drawers next to my bed, so I can easily bust them out when I should be sleeping."

Sound familiar? We thought so.

Meet Jeremy Throckmorton

As lead designer with Wahoo Studios, Jeremy Throckmorton has contributed to the emerging success of downloadable games. His recent credits include strategy titles Outpost Kali and Band of Bugs, both released under Wahoo's NinjaBee label and both available on PC or XBLA. Prior to that, he contributed to titles such as StarCraft: Brood War and Top Gear Rally 2. He is currently hard at work on an unannounced project.

Cataloguing the Classics

We delved into Throckmorton's collection and plucked out a random assortment of titles. Let's take a look, shall we?

1. Alien vs. Predator
Capcom's 1994 arcade outing was primarily a hand-to-hand brawler, a departure from the endless run-and-gun of previous Alien and Predator titles.

2. Chakan: The Forever Man
As punishment for cheating Death, the grim protagonist of SEGA's 1992 action platformer was sentenced to a low-key Mega Drive release, followed by 16 years of obscurity.

3. Galaga '88
The fourth instalment of one of the industry's most enduring franchises, this TurboGrafx-16 release from Namco retained the spirit of the original.

4. Kartia: The Word of Fate
This 1998 PlayStation RPG from Atlus featured designs by Final Fantasy veteran Yoshitaka Amano.

5. Kenseiden
At last, some much needed love for the poor old Master System! SEGA released this Samurai themed brawler in 1988.

6. Shadow President
DC True's 1994 strategy title challenged PC gamers to guide America through a foreign policy minefield.

7. Steel Battalion
Capcom's 2002 Xbox release was a godsend for hardcore mech fans. Too bad you needed a degree in robotic engineering to master the proprietary controller.

8. Record of Lodoss War
Kadokawa Shoten's Dreamcast RPG arrived in 2000. Though unheralded in the West, Japan had already developed an appetite for games, novels, manga and anime based in the Lodoss milieu.

9. Typing of the Dead
A bizarre hybrid of typing tutorial and ultra violent shooter, this 2000 Dreamcast release from Smilebit and SEGA was based on House of the Dead 2.

10. When Two Worlds War
We read the title of Impressions Games' 1993 PC strategy game six times before we were satisfied that it wasn't concocted by a dyslexic.

The Passion of the Gamer

Gameboffin Does Dallas

By Dylan Burns

Anyone who knows me well knows that I don't like change. Change and I go together about as well as Anthony Callea and an emo hair cut. It was therefore with great trepidation that I answered an email one fine morning, asking if I'd like to board one of these new flying machines and sit on my arse for about three days before getting off and magically being in the US-of-A. Of course, being a freelance games writer, and not knowing when next the largesse of an editor would swing my way, I said yes. There was also another reason for saying so; you see, I've always wondered if every Yank is as bad as the dickheads I always seem to meet in online gaming lobbies. So this would be an anthropological investigation, as well as a chance to see how many freebies I could get out of the PR guy.

I know a lot of you will be sitting there and wondering why writers and editors seem to complain so much about overseas trips, and let me tell you it's not simply for comedic reasons or to show how much cooler they are than you. Only a few years ago I was 'just a reader' like you, and my press trip experiences have shown me that these jaunts really do entail a lot of work and a lot of frustrations. It's not like a holiday where you can be a little bit lax on your schedule – everything needs to be pretty much on time, leaving very little time left for rubber-necking or exploring whatever country you happen to be in. Sometimes you don't even get to see more of a country that what you can glimpse from the seat of a taxi.

Early Dallas rodeos had few monkey acts, and spectators would frequently dance to alleviate the boredom.

In this particular case, I rocked up in Dallas, Texas (via shit-hole LA) after far too many days of flying; smelly, tired, and more than a little bit jetlagged.

But stuff it, I thought, I ain't (see, I'd already started to blend in with the natives) sittin' here feelin' sorry for myself – I need a steak. And so we (myself, the PR guy, and another Aussie journalist) went and had a meal with so much meat it would make the men's underwear section of a Target catalogue look like a vegetarian menu.

Replete from steak, beer and a dessert that we probably shouldn't have eaten, it was time to explore the corny-looking Texas boot shop next door. The owner was sporting one of the most impressive moustaches ever. No kidding, he looked just like Sam Elliot. Of course, our tourist status was completely exposed when we realised that we were perusing the women's boot section... still, those pink ones looked quite tasteful.

Then, after buying absolutely nothing (Sam was not impressed), it was time to get a cab back to our hotel. And this, my friends, was the highlight of my trip. The cab drivers in Dallas are an absolute laugh. It took us a while to figure it out but cabbies actually get a commission for every passenger that they can get to visit a strip club – which when you think about it is a very strong incentive for them to harass you into going to one. So, us being three guys late at night and all, he was very keen to put the hard sell on us, in no uncertain terms.

Being perspicacious Aussies, we decided to have a bit of fun and string him along, um-ing and ah-ing over the decision, with him getting more and more excited at the prospect of some money landing in his pocket, before we cruelly told him we were so buggered that not even the thought of seeing college girls dance around in the nude could steer us from crashing in our hotel rooms. Yeah, stupid in hindsight, I know.

But the highlight of my week or so in Dallas would have to be the rodeo. Not only did this show me the absolute contempt that Americans have for animals, but it made me appreciate just how strongly patriotic and xenophobic they are. Red, white and blue could be seen everywhere. "Who here's not from around here?" drawled the announcer and we nervously put up our hands..."Well, we outnumber you!" Great, that's nice to know, I thought – what was the damn point of that? In fact, my trip was filled with many of these WTF moments.

But back to the rodeo, the single defining moment for me was seeing a monkey tied to a sheepdog, ostensibly rounding up some sheep. Here we were, thousands of kilometers from home, watching a bloody monkey tied to a sheepdog and the crowd was going wild. It was enough to make us laugh hysterically, and laugh we did as we sipped our rancid Dr. Pepper and ate our greasy chips, sorry, fries.

Of course, no trip to Dallas would be complete without visiting the spot where JFK was shot. We did the whole touristy thing and went through the JFK museum listening to an audio guide. Then, on the final day, we were in dire need of something that reminded us of home, so we went to McDonald's. Except it still felt alien for the simple fact that this Macca's had revolving (burglary proof) doors and a security guard patrolling the store who made you leave if you weren't buying anything or looked remotely like using the bathroom more than once.

So what did my American adventure teach me? Well, not all Yanks are idiots; we actually met quite a few helpful souls. I learned that domestic American flights always get delayed. They also have some really awesome karaoke bars. But most of all I learned that I really do love coming back home, and that this country is the best place to have as a return destination. I just hope we don't become as f****d up as America.

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PSN: GameboffinAU
360 Tag: Sir Gameboffin

DEVELOPMENT HELL

"So, do you like Vikings?"*

"No. I **love** them."

There I was in the shady backstreets of a hip and inner-city suburb in the very depths of a fairly prominent Australian game developer. Like a real one with games out and all. I was having a job interview. It lasted three and a half hours. I'll spare you the suspense. I didn't get the job.

I've been in games development offices all over the world and they're all the same. Dudes in caps work in silence while the hot girls cower in the corner. No surprise here. I was really rather more relaxed than a man should be for a job interview, after all. I felt good. More importantly, I felt confident. All I knew about the job was that it had Vikings and I am a Viking nut.

A friend of my girlfriend had mentioned work was going at his office. Having been made to endure my ideas for games, she was happy to pass the word on. Probably because then I'd stop foisting my rants on to her. "Hey, what about Girl Doom! Girls go shopping on Mars and then mean boys attack them make and fun of their big bottoms! All the guns are pink! Girls love pink shite! 3D Shooter!"

We sat down and talked about my experiences as a writer, my devotion to games and my love of incredibly noncy RPGs. I was very thankful for having played a month's worth of City of Heroes because those cats loved that game. Loved it. And you have to love a job interview that encourages you to talk about the time your superheroic alter-ego, Laserpants, spent an hour just punching poor street criminals in the face. Then we got down to brass tacks. They wanted writing tryouts for a Viking themed MMO. They wanted missions, scripts, NPC pen-portraits, the whole thing.

It was a Friday. By the next Monday, I'd written a thirty page word document outlining new and interesting ways Vikings can go raiding on each other, their mates and other clans. The whole thing. I invented dudes called Snorri and Sven and Njall and more. There were raids on tunnels, group raids, raids on other players, raids on ladies underpants and God knows what. I wrote and I wrote and I wrote. I proofed. I wrote more. By Sunday evening, very late, I was a nervous wreck, dressed only in ugg-boots, a furry loincloth and a battleaxe, all things I have lying around the house. It was magnificent.

I sent that file in. And waited. And waited. And waited. After two weeks, I sent another email. "Hey guys, did you read that?"

"Not yet."

When, nearly a week later, I fired off another response, I was told "great plots, your dialogue could use some work."

What? I'm Christian Goddamn Read! That week I had a play performed, an honest to God play that was filled with rad dialogue! "How dare you, sir!" I said to an imaginary man. I sent in that play, my comics, every bit of good dialogue I've written.

Then waited. And waited. Then the email came. "Christian, we've put on more staff onto this game. You'll have to wait more." I did. I played PS2 games while drinking heavily, waiting.

Dudes in caps work in silence while the hot girls cower in the corner

"Thank you for your interest in working for Viking Wack Attack games..." it was a very formal letter but it might as well have read "Dear Christian. My dog has vomited better writing than this after drinking. Go stick your genitals onto a power grid. We hate you."

It was the end. I sighed and just sort of... gave up. No more ambitions, no more attempts. The horror. The horror. But then...

NEXT TIME – Help from the unlikeliest of sources. A PR Rep, natural foe and ally of the journalist.

***Due to a legally and spiritually binding document I signed the real subject of the game is hidden. It wasn't Vikings.**

BY CHRISTIAN READ

THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $30

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Guitar Hero 3 Bundle	Family
2	✪	Dora Save The Mermaids	Childrens
3	▼	Guitar Hero Encore Rock 80	Family
4	▼	Guitar Hero 2 (S/W)	Family
5	✪	Ratatouille	Adventure
6	▼	High School Musical (S/W)	Family
7	▲	Singstar 80S (S/W)	Family
8	✪	Buzz Junior Robo Bundle	Family
9	✪	Battle For The Pacific	Shooter
10	▲	Crash Of The Titans	Action

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $30

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Sports
2	✪	Dora Save The Mermaids	Childrens
3	▼	Cooking Mama 2	Family
4	▼	Kageyamas Maths Training	Family
5	✪	EA Playground	Family
6	▼	Pokémon Diamond	Role-Playing
7	▼	Brain Training	Family
8	▲	Hanna Montana	Adventure
9	▲	Mario Kart	Racing
10	✪	Avatar: The Burning Earth	Action

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	Guitar Hero 3 Double Pack	Family
2	▼	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Sports
3	▲	Super Mario Galaxy	Action
4	▼	Guitar Hero 3 Bundle	Family
5	▲	Mario Party 8	Family
6	▲	Lego SW: Complete Saga	Adventure
7	✪	Bully Scholarship Edition	Action
8	▲	Ghost Squad	Shooter
9	▲	Zelda Twilight Princess	Role-Playing
10	▲	Super Paper Mario	Action

TOP 10 Playstation 3 Games Over $60

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

	▲	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Shooter
2	▲	Uncharted Drakes Fortune	Adventure
3	▼	Guitar Hero 3 Bundle	Family
4	▲	Conflict: Denied Ops	Shooter
5	▲	Burnout Paradise	Racing
6	▼	Assasins Creed	Action
7	◆	Devil May Cry 4	Action
8	▼	Unreal Tournament 3	Shooter
9	▲	Ratchet & Clank: Tools	Action
10	▲	Lost	Adventure

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims 2 Free Time	Strategy
2	✪	Warhammer 40K Soul Storm	Strategy
3	▼	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Shooter
4	▼	World Of Warcraft	Role-Playing
5	✪	Frontlines Fuel Of War	Shooter
6	✪	Warhammer 40K Dawn War	Strategy
7	▼	WOW Burning Crusade	Role-Playing
8	▼	Crysis	Shooter
9	▼	The Sims Castaway Stories	Strategy
10	▼	WOW Battlechest	Role-Playing

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Assasins Creed	Action
2	✪	Frontlines Fuel Of War	Shooter
3	▼	Guitar Hero 3 Rock Bundle	Family
4	✪	Bully Scholarship Editon	Action
5	▼	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Shooter
6	▼	Halo 3	Shooter
7	▼	Lost Odyssey	Role-Playing
8	▼	Devil May Cry 4	Action
9	◆	Conflict: Denied Ops	Shooter
10	▲	Smackdown V Raw 2008	Fighting

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Guitar Hero 3 Bundle	PlayStation 2
2	▲	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Nintendo DS
3	✪	Guitar Hero 3 Double Pack	Nintendo Wii
4	▲	The Sims 2 Free Time	PC/MAC
5	▲	Assasins Creed	Xbox 360
6	✪	Dora Save The Mermaids	Nintendo DS
7	✪	Frontlines Fuel Of War	Xbox 360
8	▼	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Nintendo Wii
9	▼	Guitar Hero 3 Rock Bundle	Xbox 360
10	✪	Bully Scholarship Editon	Xbox 360

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 9th March 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
2	▲	Need For Speed Pro Street	Racing
3	▲	Medal Of Honor Heroes 2	Shooter
4	▲	Fifa 2008	Sports
5	▲	Crash Of The Titans	Action
6	▼	Patapon	Adventure
7	▲	Tiger Woods PGA 2008	Sports
8	▼	Final Fantasy 1 Anniversary	Role-Playing
9	▼	Smackdown V Raw 2008	Fighting
10	▼	Ricky Ponting 2007:Pressure	Sports

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

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HY44215	HY47234	Flo Rida feat T Pain - Low
HY44052	HY47086	Leona Lewis - Bleeding Love
HY44404	---	The Last Goodnight - Pictures Of You
HY44261	HY47156	Soulja Boy Tellem - Crank That (Soulja Boy)
HY44183	HY47129	Britney Spears - Piece Of Me
HY44336	HY47193	The Veronicas - Untouched
HY44216	---	Jordin Sparks - Tattoo
HY44419	---	M. Jackson ft Akon - Wanna Be Startin Somethin 2008
HY44053	HY47087	Chris Brown - Kiss Kiss
HY44405	HY47207	Kelly Rowland - Work
HY44489	HY47223	One Republic - Stop and Stare
HY43994	HY47069	Timbaland Pts Onerepublic - Apologize
HY44226	---	The Potbelleez - Dont Hold Back
HY43996	HY47102	Alicia Keys - No One
HY44395	HY47208	Rogue Traders - I Never Liked You
HY44477	---	Kat Deluna - Whine Up
HY44518	---	The Presets - My People
HY44356	HY47200	Kylie Minogue - Wow

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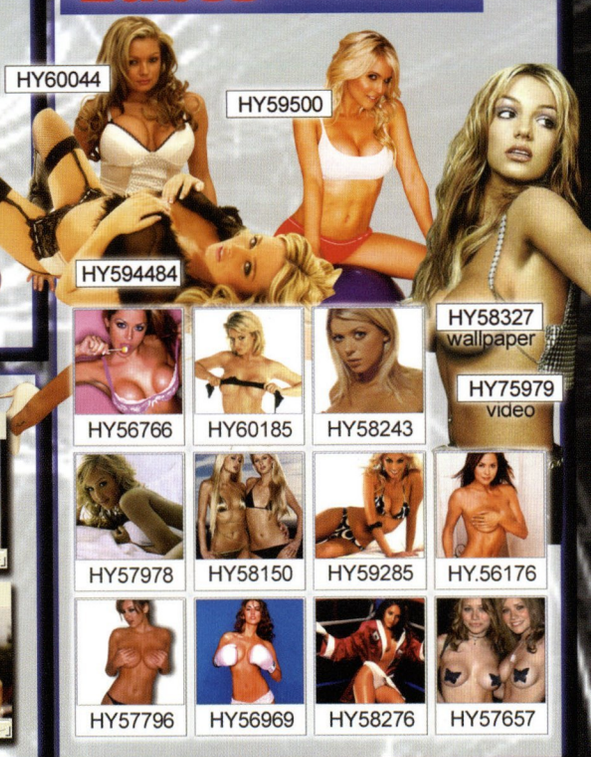

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