

THE LATEST ON **PLAYSTATION 3** AND **NINTENDO REVOLUTION**

HYPER

PS2 1ST LOOK

GOD OF WAR 2

Bigger, sexier & more brutal than ever



DS REVIEW

METROID PRIME DS

The greatest FPS ever on a handheld?

PS2 HANDS-ON

24
PAGES OF
PREVIEWS



FINAL FANTASY VII DIRGE OF CERBERUS:

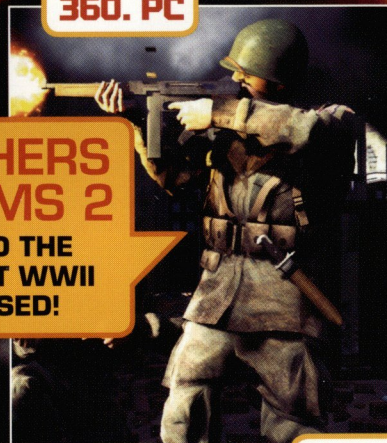
Square's classic RPG revisited

MICRO MACHINES v4

The ultimate multiplayer racing game returns

NEXT-GEN SHOWCASE

**XBOX
360. PC**



BROTHERS IN ARMS 2

SEQUEL TO THE
SMARTEST WWII
FPS EXPOSED!

DEAD RISING

ONE MAN,
THOUSANDS OF
ZOMBIES - YOU
DO THE MATH

**XBOX
360**

STRANGLEHOLD

JOHN WOO'S HARD-BOILED
GETS A KILLER VIDEOGAME
SEQUEL!

**PS3. PC.
XBOX 360**



UT 2007

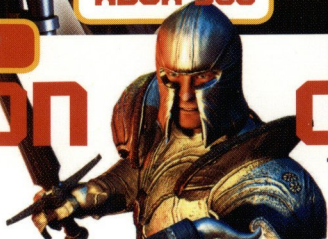
INCREDIBLE GRAPHICS
DON'T MAKE A GAME,
BUT THEY SURE HELP

**PC.
PS3.**

PC/360 REVIEW

OBLIVION

Is this the best
RPG of all time?



GCN REVIEW

CHIBI-ROBO

The GameCube gets a great
exclusive title!



A next MAGAZINE



52

#152 JUNE 2006
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NEW DEPTHS OF STRATEGY NEW HEIGHTS OF GLORY

The new era of strategy games has arrived.
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UBISOFT

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One night in a small town of Washington, four friends gathered, as they often did, to talk and play games. On this particular night however a dream was planted in their hearts when one of the friends suggested that they make games of their very own... More than 10 years on and this circle of friends are the creators of the world's largest publisher of hobby games Wizards of the Coast.

Founded in 1990 by Peter Adkison, Wizards of the Coast took on an entirely new game genre in 1993 with the release of the Magic: The Gathering trading card game. Created by Richard Garfield, a mathematician and award-winning game designer, Magic is the premier trading card game. Today, with an estimated fan base of more than seven million players, the Magic game is played in social and competition settings in more than 52 countries worldwide. There are over 80,000 official tournaments held each year, with the prize money available to be won each year totaling over US\$3 million.

The Magic game made its debut at the GenCon game fair in August 1993.

Creator Richard Garfield called his game "Mana Flash!" and publisher Wizards of the Coast renamed it to Magic: The Gathering

The first Magic game released by Wizards of the Coast was referred to as "Alpha."

Wizards of the Coast has released more than 6,300 distinct Magic cards and 34 different Magic card expansion sets since the Magic game was first published. Today, there are several billion Magic cards in circulation across the world.

MAGIC GLOBALLY

There are more than six million Magic players in 70+ countries.

The Magic game is currently available in nine languages, including Chinese (traditional and simplified), English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese and Korean. Over the years, the Magic game rules have been translated to 19 different languages, among them Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin.

The reigning Magic World Champion is Katsuhiko Mori from Japan.

MAGIC TOURNAMENTS

Official Magic tournaments have been hosted by all seven continents – Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, South America and even Antarctica, where a U.S. Army base hosted a Magic tournament.

The best Magic players in the world compete on the Magic: The Gathering Pro Tour™. Each year, the Magic Pro Tour awards more than \$3 million in prize money.

MAGIC

The Gathering®



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The spiritual videogame sequel to one of the all-time great action films...

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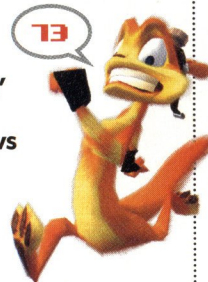
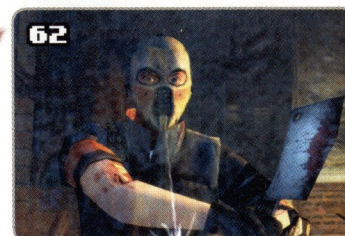
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SUBSCRIBE AND WIN A BUNCH OF PSP GAMES ON PAGE 18!

EDITORIAL

>>It's been one hell of a busy month in Hyperland. Wilks flew to Spain to lamp it up in a five star resort and see how Scarface is coming along. Ed Dawson flew over to the UK, Sweden and Paris (if you look closely at some of the riot shots you may just be able to make him out – they christened him "Fou Ed" over there) to see a whole bunch of titles. He's given us the low-down on Neverwinter Nights II this issue. Meanwhile, I got the chance to hit Tokyo for a week (with Spaniards, Brits, Swedes and Frenchmen oddly enough) to visit SEGA and see some of the hottest titles they have on the horizon. You'll have to wait until next month for the details though as I'm still in a bit of a daze, with images of Razor Ramon and beetle fights dancing in my head. Tokyo. Ya gotta love it.

In between all that we've whipped up a killer issue covering some of the most exciting next gen titles on the horizon, while not leaving behind those that haven't made the investment. God of War 2 or Micro Machines v4 anyone? Handheld owners also have plenty to be excited about with Metroid Prime: Hunters more than living up to expectations and Daxter also chiming in as the best PSP platformer to date. Hell, even Cube owners have an exclusive title to get excited about this month – the excellent Chibi-Robo. Could it be? An issue where everyone is happy? Oh... yeah... sorry Mac users, it just ain't going to happen.

Cam Shea >> Editor



[up] Tokyo Overload

HYPER >>

ISSUE 152

JUNE 2006

WRITE TO HYPER!

78 Renwick St, Redfern
NSW 2016, Australia
Ph: (02) 9699 0333
Fax: (02) 9310 1315
E-mail: freakscene@next.com.au

EDITORIAL

Editor: **Cam Shea**
Deputy Editor: **Daniel Wilks**
Art Director: **Malcolm Campbell**

ADVERTISING

Advertising Managers:
Matt Tang
E-mail: matthewt@next.com.au
Ph: (02) 9699 0367
Fax: (02) 9310 2012
Nathan Hill
E-mail: nathanh@next.com.au
Ph: (02) 9699 0349

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscription Co-ordinator: **Digby Naude**
Customer Service: **Justine Lynch**
For all Subscription enquiries phone:
(02) 9699 0320
(02) 9699 0327
Email: subs@next.com.au

MANAGEMENT

Publisher: **Phillip Keir**
Finance Director: **Theo Fatseas**
Operations Director: **Melissa Doyle**
National Sales Director: **Lynette Rochford**
E-mail: lynetter@next.com.au
Ph: (02) 9699 0305

PRODUCTION

Production Co-ordinator: **Leiani Reardon**
E-mail: leianir@next.com.au
Ph: (02) 9699 0356
Fax: (02) 9310 2012
Ad Production: **Dylan Fryer**
E-mail: dylanf@next.com.au
IT Support: **Fahri Cantas**

Printed CTP by: **WEBSTAR**
Distribution by: **Gordon & Gotch**
Customer Service Ph: 1300 65 0666
Fax: 1300 65 0777

CONTRIBUTORS

Mikolai, Patrick Kolan, Alexander James Burke, Christopher Taylor, Ed Dawson, Tim Henderson, Dylan Burns, Daniel Staines, March Stepnik, Kosta Andreadis, Seamus Byrne, Sally Woellner.

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Next Publishing Pty Ltd
ACN 002 647 645
ISSN 1320-7458

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor

1. Dead Rising – Xbox 360
"Bottle of wine = full health. There's a life lesson there."
2. New Super Mario Bros – DS
3. Virtua Fighter 5 – Arcade
4. Virtua Tennis 3 – Arcade
5. Table Tennis – Xbox 360

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor

1. Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – Xbox 360
"Everything that Morrowind promised to be but failed to deliver."
2. Fight Night Round 3 – Xbox 360
3. Table Tennis – Xbox 360
4. Tetris DS – DS
5. Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time – DS

Malcolm Campbell - Art

1. Shadow of the Colossus – PS2
"Amazing. Maybe even better than Ico."
2. We ♥ Katamari – PS2
3. OutRun 2006 – PSP
4. Micro Machines v4 – PS2
5. World Poker Tour – PSP

Kosta Andreadis - Half of "CVK"

1. Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – PC
"I'd rather be playing than writing this."
2. A little more Oblivion
3. Take a break and discuss Oblivion on online forums
4. Nap and dream about playing Oblivion
5. Metroid Prime: Hunters? Nope, wake up and play Oblivion

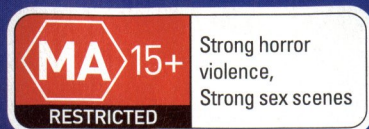
SINK YOUR TEETH INTO THIS!

“A worthy sequel and
a bloody good ride”

— Chris Carle IGN FILMFORCE

As the war between vampires and werewolves rages on,
the legacy of both races is revealed, in the exhilarating
sequel **UNDERWORLD: EVOLUTION** on DVD.

Starring **KATE BECKINSALE** and **SCOTT SPEEDMAN**
this fast paced, action-packed thrill-ride will keep you on
the edge of your seat as the battle unfolds.



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News

IN THE NEWS: Kutaragi claims PS3 will get you chicks. Heaps of chicks! / Pan and James official new Hyper mascots

SONY

PS3 AT THE GDC

Region Free A Go Go

With E3 just around the corner Sony have started their massive information campaign, bringing the PS3 still closer to the light. At this year's GDC (Game Developer's Conference) Sony have dropped a number of bombs that not only whet the appetite but raise a bunch of questions about the console and the company itself.

The first bit of information that came as both a dig at Microsoft and a bit of self congratulation, was when Phil Harrison confirmed that all developers are being told to develop games on the assumption that the 60GB HDD is present, though, oddly, he couldn't actually confirm that the HDD would be shipped in the box. Making the HDD an optional extra would definitely be an odd choice for Sony if this design stipulation is being enforced as it would cut off a large portion of the user base from playing games.

By far the biggest and most important piece of information

dropped by Harrison in his keynote speech is that the PS3 will be region free, not just the hardware (like the Xbox 360) but the software as well. This is massive news for an out of the way place like Australia as it not only means that we can finally and fully legally import games to play without having to resort to quasi-legal mod chipping but it also means that we may no longer be lumped in with European timing as far as game releases go. Sure there is still the problem with PAL/NTSC compatibility but with the HDTV slant of the new consoles and the universality of the format it could very well mean that we get games released much earlier than we are currently used to. The region free move is a little out of character for Sony; at a recent IEAA conference a Sony rep praised region coding as being the greatest defence against piracy and stated flat out that it was for our own

defence and that they would not consider doing away with the standard any time soon.

The reason for the region free move to us seems to be two fold. For a start, as things currently stand Blu-Ray is something of a wasted format. Games will not, for quite a while, fill the discs making them a very expensive and underutilised format. Removing the region coding will allow developers to fit multiple versions of the game in different languages on one disc allowing for a global rollout instead of territory by territory. The other reason we can see is that currently Blu-Ray is an uncracked format making piracy less of a problem to begin with. It is not known if the Blu-Ray movie playback is region free but it would not surprise us at all to learn that the film branch of Sony still imposed region coding on Blu-Ray films. More on PS3 next month...

First Look!

DUE: LATE 2006

GANGS OF LONDON PSP • Developer: SCEE London • The Hype: "Action meets strategy as you take on London's fiercest gangs in a bid for domination of the capital."



NINTY

NOT A LOT OF REV?

What's under the hood?

Another day another set of 'leaked' Revolution specs. Usually we pay them no mind but this time around the sources, though unconfirmed, appear to be a little more reliable than some guy who may or may not have worked with some company doing something that may have something to do with the Revolution, and the actual numbers seem to fit in with Nintendo's overall goal of not necessarily competing in the current next-generation console war but instead delivering a unique style of gameplay based around a revolutionary controller that is supported by the hardware. Combined with the fact that Nintendo have expressed no interest in actually talking about specs, this may be the closest we get to the actual truth until the console is released and some website pulls one apart and voids their warranty. As far as straight numbers go, the Revolution looks a little undercooked but considering how pretty a number of games on the GCN looked compared to the supposedly more powerful current generation consoles they really mean very little.

Originally reported by IGN, not the most reliable of sources but not prone to outright fabrication, a number of game developers have placed the architecture as being; a CPU clocked at 729MHz, GPU

running at 243MHz and 88MB of onboard RAM including 24MB of "main" RAM and a further 64MB of "external" RAM (we're currently not too sure what this means). On the surface these numbers seem rather low, the CPU clocking in lower than the 733MHz Xbox and being positively dwarfed by the 3.2GB cores of both the Sony and Microsoft next-generation systems but then again the CPU is half again as fast as the GCN's 485MHz CPU. This last measure is more of a yardstick than comparing the still ephemeral console with the already released 360 and heavily publicised PS3. The GPU is also about half again as powerful as that of the GCN and 10MHz more powerful than that seen in the Xbox but once again vastly less powerful than those seen in the 360 and PS3. This won't necessarily mean that Revolution games will look worse. As the only console in the next-generation to not demand high definition display as one of the defining features, the Revolution can afford to cut down on video processing power without actually losing image quality. Sure, without HD the images won't be as detailed and crisp but on SDTV does this matter? Finally the RAM. 88MB may seem like a drop in the bucket compared to the 512MB on both of the other consoles but without seeing the console in action 88MB is just a number with a couple of

letters tacked on at the end. It does appear to be a small number but without knowing how much RAM the Cell chip will be utilising for simple processing and how much will be used for high definition rendering it will remain nothing but a number.

Before any Nintendo fanboy accuses us of bashing the company for having low specs, read the last few paragraphs again. Anyway, these numbers are simply a bare bones look at the (unconfirmed) comparative power of the systems and have no real world impact until we see them all running side by side for comparison. Bring on E3.



Winners! HYPER 150

AEON FLUX

WINNER

- Dorian Walsh, Tapping, WA

RUNNERS UP

- Tim Grabowski, Wanniasa, A.C.T
- Rod Masterson, Newmarket, QLD
- Jess Husband, Alexandria, NSW
- Mark Vellios, Ballajura, WA

ATV

- Mitchell Ellerby, Whyalla Stuart, SA
- Cam Phillips, Bega, NSW
- Gary Clark, Balwyn North, VIC
- Simon Wagner, Carindale, QLD
- Luke Eller, North Gosford, NSW



CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with

Caption This Part 79 in the subject line.

PART 79



Coming soon, the adventures of Snortle chucklesworth...

OVERFLOW

Slightly late we know but if you're in Melbourne, get along to the "Playing The Movies" exhibit at the ACMI. It looks at the development of Machinima (short films made using game engines — think Red vs Blue) over the last decade and runs until the 21st of May. Even shorter notice, on the 6th and 7th of May is the Machinima Film Festival, also at the ACMI! Check out www.acmi.net.au for more details.

The creator of Tetris, Alexey Pajitnov, is at it again! Want to try out his latest puzzler Dwise? Then head on over to <http://www.wildsnake.com/puzzle/dw/>.

The Point Blank games were among our favourite arcade and PlayStation light gun games, so we were stoked to find out that Namco are putting together a new one... for DS! Yes, you'll tap the screen. Fingers crossed it has the same fun factor.

The fourth instalment in the Rayman series is in development. Bit of a no brainer we know, but Michel Ancel (and Ubisoft Montpellier) is once again at the helm so it should be pants tres bien! The game will be out this year on current and next-generation consoles.

Lionhead, the studio behind Black & White and Fable, has been sold to Microsoft for an undisclosed sum, and will become part of the Microsoft Game Studios group. Will they prove to be a better purchase than Rare? We'll have to wait and see.

Microsoft recently announced at a press conference in Japan that a new Final Fantasy game would be making its way to Xbox 360 in 2007. No details — or even a name — were revealed however. We should find out at E3. Maybe.

Amos will be so excited. WWE Smackdown! Vs Raw is coming to both PS3 and 360 during the jolly season later this year. Oh and don't forget PS2 and PSP. While we don't know whether the next gen versions will be developed independently, we do know that Yuke's is still on board, so you can expect a certain level of quality.

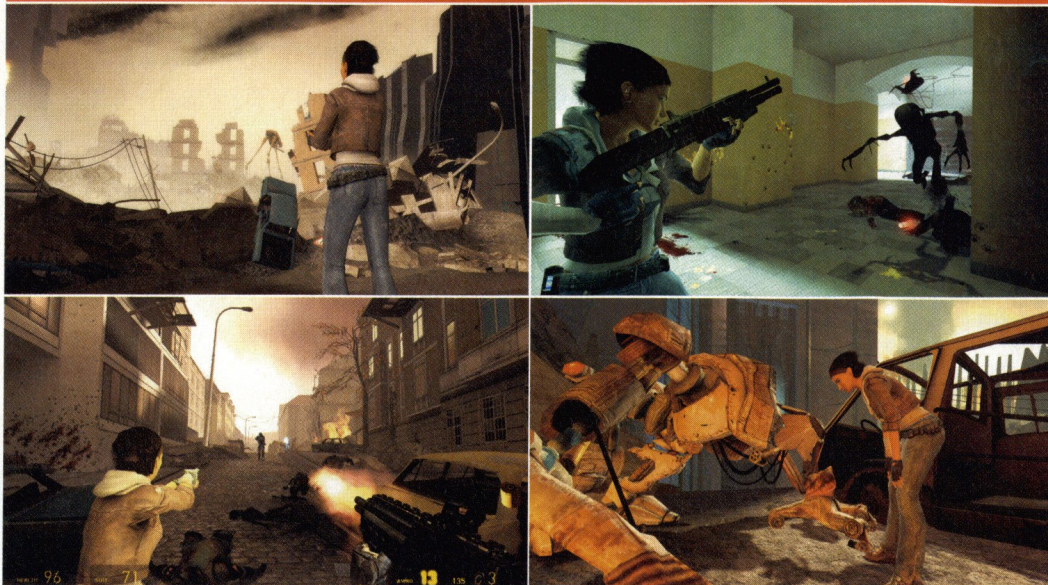
We also know that voice chat support for online play will be supported, which has us thinking about all the trash talk that will go down, and possibly even observers providing colour commentary.

Now that could be cool...

Out Soon!

DUE: MAY(BE) 31

HALF-LIFE 2 EPISODE 1 PC • Developer: Valve • The Hype: What happens after the events of Half-Life 2?



New Screens!

DUE: 2006

HUXLEY PC/Xbox 360 • Developer: Webzen • The Hype: Twitch-based FPS meets MMO in a post apocalyptic world.



The Gizmondo Story

-When the going gets weird-



BY MIKOLAJ

It seems the party is over for Gizmondo and its car crashing, money burning, mafia associated executives. While the comical escapades of Stefan Eriksson, Carl Freer, et al, have kept us in raptures this past year, massive financial losses have finally seen the company placed in liquidation and its fledgling handheld shelved.

Marketed as a handheld gaming device, MP3 player and satellite navigation system rolled into one, the Gizmondo was launched in March 2005 at the company's flagship London store. With no expense spared, the event saw Jamiroquai, Sting, Pharrell Williams, Busta Rhymes and 'glamour' model Jodie Marsh paid huge sums of money just to show up and act interested. Unfortunately, the boozed up launch proved to be the high water mark in Gizmondo's short lived history.

Flushed with investment capital, the company's executives had to dream up ways to spend it all. Rather than using said money for boring 'traditional' things like games development or marketing, they opted, instead, to buy a modeling agency. Apparently it was less of a hassle than hiring models for one-off events. Shortly afterwards, the same executive team shelled out for a racehorse named, er, Gizmondo. The horse raced once, placed 14th out of 16 entrants, and was promptly forgotten about. Or taken to the knackers - details remain sketchy.

All this reckless and seemingly random spending wouldn't have been a problem if sales targets were being hit. This, however, wasn't the case. In the first three months after launch, the Gizmondo sold just 5000 units in the UK. The fact that people could only buy the handheld from 'specialist' Gizmondo shops probably didn't help matters. Or the small matter of Nintendo launching the DS 8 days prior to the Gizmondo.

While Gizmondo was already looking like a trainwreck by late 2005 - a mere six months after launch - the amount of money the company was hemorrhaging didn't become apparent until they were forced to release their financial results. Tiger Telematics, Gizmondo's parent company, faced a net loss of approx \$US99 million in 2004, and an operating loss of \$210 million over the first half of 2005. The company blamed these figures on "Development costs for the

Gizmondo and non-cash expenses."

Still, IT'S ONLY MONEY. Besides, Gizmondo needed all that cash. How else could Eriksson, Freer and other executives afford to pay their spouses over \$300,000 in consultancy fees, buy them \$70,000 luxury cars and pay them a \$80,000 performance bonus? Not that the boys went without; annual vehicles expenses for top executives ran between \$104,000 and \$280,000 a year - that's a lot of taxis. And that's before we even get into actual 'real money' salaries: Eriksson and Freer had base salaries of \$1.5 million, each, and shares worth an estimated \$94 million.

As interesting as these financial arrangements were, the part where Gizmondo paid developer Northern Lights \$3.5 million to develop 'Chicane' and 'Colours' was particularly dodgy. Turns out that 'Chicane' and 'Colours' were actually being developed in-house at Gizmondo. Oh, and Northern Lights was owned by Eriksson and Freer - the same executives at Gizmondo that authorised the payment. Funny that.

If all these 'financial irregularities' weren't enough to have regulatory bodies worried, the news that Eriksson and a number of other top executives had served prison terms in Sweden for "financial fraud related to counterfeit money and an attempted \$3m scam on a financial institution" certainly should have had alarm bells ringing. Eriksson was believed to be the brains behind the failed scam and was part of a group referred to by the media as the 'Uppsala Mafia': named after a town in Sweden where the group operated and where, coincidentally, Gizmondo ran its Swedish operations out of.

Eriksson resigned amidst the allegations and Freer followed shortly afterwards, claiming that the company was now past the start-up position where his "entrepreneurial skills were most relevant".

Amidst all this drama, Gizmondo was finally launched in the U.S. in the lead up to Christmas 2005. Predictably, it sold very little. Still, new CEO Michael Carrender remained upbeat, insisting that everything was fine even as the company went into financial freefall. This 'stiff upper lip' approach saw certain web forums awash with INCREDIBLY LIBELOUS claims that the whole venture was nothing more than a front for massive money laundering.

Losing money at a fantastic rate, the Gizmondo story should have ended on February 8 2006, with the company placed in liquidation by the UK High Court. Of course this is the

comedy pairing of Eriksson and Freer that we're talking about and things aren't that straightforward. Or dull.

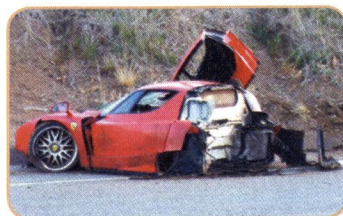
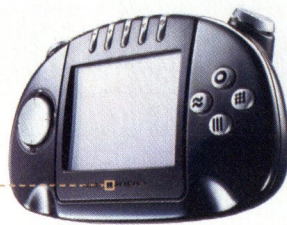
While the courts seized Gizmondo property in Europe, Eriksson was busy crashing cars in California. The former Gizmondo executive managed to wrap an uninsured, Ferrari Enzo, valued at \$1 million, around a power pole. According to news reports on www.Eurogamer.net "The car in question was traveling at an estimated 160mph... when it slammed into a power pole, leaving the vehicle sliced in two. Police believe the Ferrari was taking part in a street race with an SLR Mercedes (reported stolen to Scotland Yard), worth around \$500,000."

The Twist? Eriksson's blood alcohol level was over the limit but he claimed he wasn't driving the car. Instead, he stated that a Germany man named 'Dietrich' was the driver and had fled the scene. A three-hour search by police failed to find any sign of the 'mystery' driver. Although they did find a gun magazine 'clip' lying nearby.

Oh, and just to make things really interesting, the LA Times later reported that police were attempting to ascertain the whereabouts of two men who arrived shortly after the crash, flashed cards which said they were from 'Homeland Security', spoke with Eriksson and then disappeared. Right...

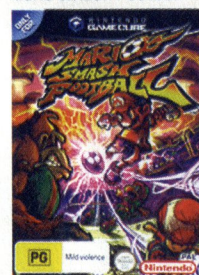
The latest reports to come out of the U.S. have police impounding Eriksson's Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren (the same one allegedly involved in the street race). Turns out the car was unlicensed and, oh yeah, SCOTLAND YARD CLAIMS IT'S STOLEN. Somehow, Eriksson has managed to keep himself out of prison...

Sadly, that's where the story ends: Gizmondo is currently in liquidation, Freer is off starting a new venture and Eriksson is claiming that mystery men are crashing his cars... Still, what a ride it's been. Gizmondo and its executives blazed a trail of destruction across the videogame landscape that would put Atari circa 1984 to shame. So thanks for the memories guys! You've been great. The daily news headlines just won't be the same without you.



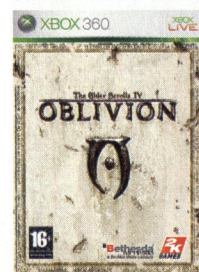
GAMECUBE

Mario Smash Football



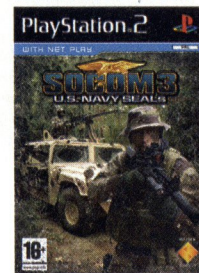
XBOX 360

Oblivion The Elder Scrolls IV



PLAYSTATION 2

SOCOM 3 US Navy Seals



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Xbox 360

We -finally- have ignition

An event survived by Patrick Kolan

It was a media circus; the Xbox 360 launch was a loud, bright and hyperactive affair, tinted green and fuelled by free pizza and soft drinks. It rained like a mo-fo, but for the early adopters, what's a little rain when you're in line to buy into the next big thing?

THE EVENT: PART ONE

The night started off slowly. Trucks unloaded a dozen 360 gamestations, event management scurried around like the Secret Service, shooing bystanders as they cleared space for a performance area. Tents were raised. The skies darkened and people began to titter with anticipation, skirting the area like gaming vultures, waiting for a feed.

By half past eight, things were swinging. The DJs had the music blaring, the foxy 'Xbox Dancers' carried out a brief rehearsal, much to the delight of the security, who eyed them, salivating. It was kind of a surreal scene.

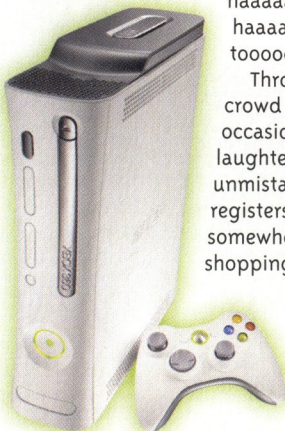
As the sky opened and rain fell, reps began to hand out ponchos - I think I came away with eight of those suckers. People were grabbing those things like they were going out of fashion.

Breakdancers spun, martial artists flipped and kicked, B-grade celebrities lounged on couches and still the rain poured down.

DJs lead the congregation in such witty verses as: 'When I say "three", you say "sixty"! "Three!" "... ..sixty.' Or the perennial favourite, 'Lemme hear you say a Microsoft... Microsoft. I waaaaant it. I waaaaant it. Gotta haaaaaave it. Gotta haaaaaave it. Give it tooooo me...' And so on.

Through the muted crowd chant and occasional heckling laughter was the unmistakable ping of cash registers warming to life, somewhere deep inside the shopping centre.

By 11:30, the crowd swelled to 700 or so, and there was an electric fervour in the air.



Kramer Bennett:

Q: I take it you're buying a 360?

A: Is the Space Pope green? [Yes. Yes it is.]

Q: And what games are you getting?

A: Ummm, Call of Duty, Oblivion, Ghost Recon. Maybe another one.

Q: Are you gonna be investing in a PS3?

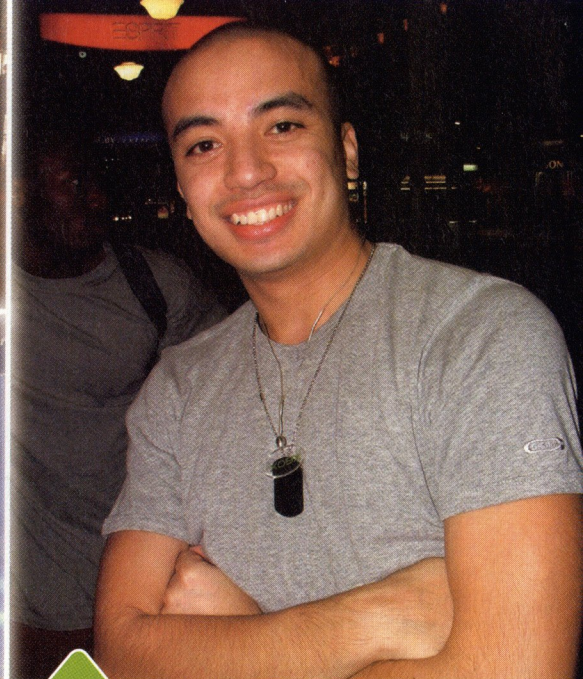
A: No. Nope, the PS3 is gonna be overpriced. And as usual, Sony make these huge promises and then they never deliver on their commitments. I'd get a Revolution over a PS3 though.

Q: What games are you looking forward to?

A: [Gets a little giddy] Oh! Tons! Mass Effect, Splinter Cell, Huxley, Oblivion, Blazing Skies... heaps. They've got some great games coming.

Q: HD TV? Or projector, maybe?

A: Neither, actually. But I'm getting one really soon. The 360's my sole reason for getting one.



Eric, XBL GAMERTAG: 'DELTAKORO'

Q: You look like you're buying tonight. Are you?

A: Yes, going to get GRAW, PDZ and Oblivion.

Q: And will you be coming back for a PS3 in November?

A: Hell naw, man. Sony make so many promises... they never make good on 'em. Have you seen that thing, man? There are so many pointless features on there. They're focusing on entertainment, not games. They're letting the gaming part slide. So no way.

Q: What about Nintendo's next?

A: Not gonna get a Revolution, either. I love Nintendo, but they've lost out over here. They should just merge with Microsoft. That would be cool. But no Rev, either.

Q: Are you gonna play on Xbox Live?

A: I've been playing Xbox Live, bro! Simple, cheap, clean. Nothing comes close to Live, man! Gonna pick up a small HD TV too. Nothing too expensive.





Mathew Karbowski

Q: What are you picking up tonight?

A: COD, PDZ, GRAW, Oblivion and Kameo

Q: Are you a PlayStation 3 man as well?

A: No way. I mean, the quality of games on PS2 was disappointing. Even though I owned about 30 PSOne games, I still got really bored with the system. Same with the PS2. Xbox has the games I want.

Q: What kind of TV are you packing?

A: I've got a 109cm Samsung rear-projection at home that I bought last weekend in anticipation for this weekend!

Q: Did you care about the delay?

A: Not really, because it meant that I could save for the TV. Plus, I get to pick up Ghost Recon and Oblivion at launch!



Julian Tennant:

Q: You buying an -

A: Yes! Of course!

Q: Yeah, it's kind of a silly question I guess. But I suppose some people are just here for the free food and novelties. [I motion towards a hobo with a slice of pizza and a complimentary poncho. Good for him.] So what games are you nabbing?

A: I'm picking up Ghost Recon, Call of Duty, Kameo and Perfect Dark Zero. Actually, I'm really glad that GR was in the launch. That was one of my main reasons for getting a 360. Perfect Dark as well, especially for the Live play.

Q: PS3: Yea or Nay?

A: Not gonna get a PS3. I just prefer the quality of games on the Xbox 360. I'll stick with them 'til the end.



Mahmoud Afiouni: XBL GAMERTAG: 'MACSTA'

Q: Buying or watching?

A: Buying! Definitely! I'm getting PGR3, Fight Night, PDZ, GRAW, COD, umm, what else, Quake 4, Gun, ummm...

ME: What, there's more?

A: Yep. Ummm... Kameo. Kameo, that's it.

Q: Wow, fair enough. What about a PS3?

A: I'm a gamer, man! Of course I'll get a PS3! Man, I don't care if it's \$2000 - I'll be getting it. And I'll be here for Nintendo as well.

Q: What is it you like specifically about the 360?

A: Xbox Live. It's one of the main reasons I'm so hyped about the 360. I do prefer the games on Xbox too, but I'll be getting a PS3 for Metal Gear and Gran Turismo.

Q: How did you feel about the delay?

A: To be honest, I wasn't pissed about the delay. It meant that the units were tested for faults and improved over the US launch. Plus, there's a lot more games to choose from now. That said, we really should be launching alongside America and the UK. Why the hell did Japan get it before Australia? Nobody wants this thing over there, but we have the highest per-capita rate of Xbox adoption of any country in the world!

Q: Are you the proud owner of an HD TV, too?

A: You bet. I've got an 81cm LCD that I bought specifically for the 360 and the whole HD era.



Amanda Bates:

Q: So, you're buying a 360, then?

A: Sure am. He's getting one too. [points to Kramer Bennett]

Q: Why a 360 and not a PS3 in November?

A: I don't like PlayStation. And I really, really want a new Splinter Cell. I'd cry if I missed out on it.

Q: What games are you picking up tonight?

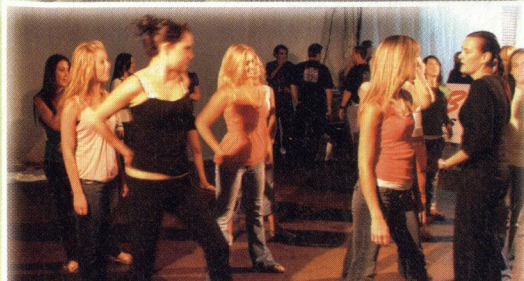
A: Kameo and Ghost Recon.

Q: How did you feel about the delay?

A: I was kind of sad about it - particularly that every other country got it first! But at least this way, we get a lot of titles to choose from!

Q: Have you got an HD TV? What about Xbox Live?

A: No HD, but I'm definitely into Live.





Phillip Vanhout, Ryan Gardam, Andrew Whipp and Ben Hanlon

Q: You all buying systems tonight?

Group: Yeah.

Phillip: But I'm gonna mooch the games off them!

Q: [turning to the others] And what games are you picking up, then?

Ryan: Tony Hawk, Gun, PDZ, PGR3 and DOA4.

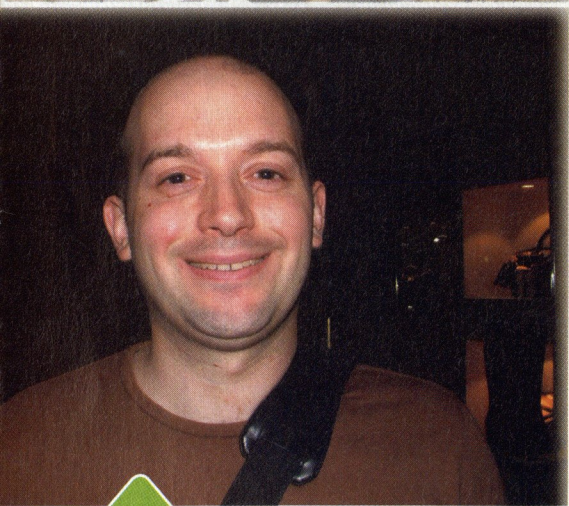
Andrew: Project Gotham. That's all.

Ben: PDZ. And I want Far Cry when it comes out...

Q: DO any of you own HD TVs?

Ben: Yes, I do.

Me: So, looks like the party's at your place then.



Simon Harris

Q: Alright. So, what are you picking up tonight?

A: Project Gotham Racing 3, Perfect Dark Zero, Call of Duty and Burnout Revenge! And a 360, obviously.

Q: Would you shell out for a PS3 after this?

A: Well, maybe. It depends on the price. If Sony were to release it at about the same price as the 360, maybe \$650 to \$750, then that would be nice. But if it's over a \$1000, I'm gonna wait.

Q: Are you going to use Xbox Live?

A: I'm already on Xbox Live! I love my Halo 2 and Burnout 3 on there. I can't wait to try out Revenge!

Q: Any games you're looking forward to?

A: Halo 3! Definitely. Any new Sci Fi games as well. There's this trilogy coming out... Human something. Damn, what was the name? [mumbles]

Me: Too Human?

A: Yeah! That looks awesome. So, any Sci Fi. Too Human and Huxley especially.



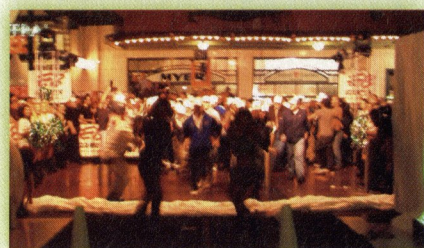
Official Xbox Dancer girls:

Q: Heh. So, are any of you actually buying a system tonight?

Cute Brunette: [a sly, knowing wink] Yeah, we ALL are. Sure we are! Uh-uh! [laughter]

What I should have asked: Do YOU come with the console?

Predicted response: Oh you! [high-pitched giggle]



THE EVENT: PART TWO

At 11:50, I positioned myself inside the shopping centre corridor, awaiting the swollen tide of eager gamers and opportunistic homeless to charge inwards. In front of me, silhouetted by the projector outside, stood Kameo and Joanna Dark. They practised their poses as a rep warned them to make sure to run like hell as the gamers charge. Then she directed them to a safe inlet of refuge, just in case.

I laughed to myself as I thought, they haven't got a hot hope in hell of getting out of the way.

The countdown finished up, the curtain was raised and like a tsunami, people bolt in and around and past me. The two models were enveloped. They just disappeared. I really hope they got out of there. It looked gruesome.

CONCLUSION

And like any birth, there was a shaft of light, it was all wet and there was plenty of screaming. Thus, the 360 was brought into the nation. And there were plenty of adopters.

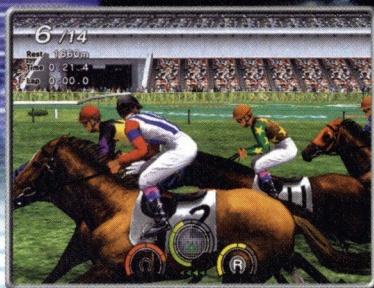
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the post?

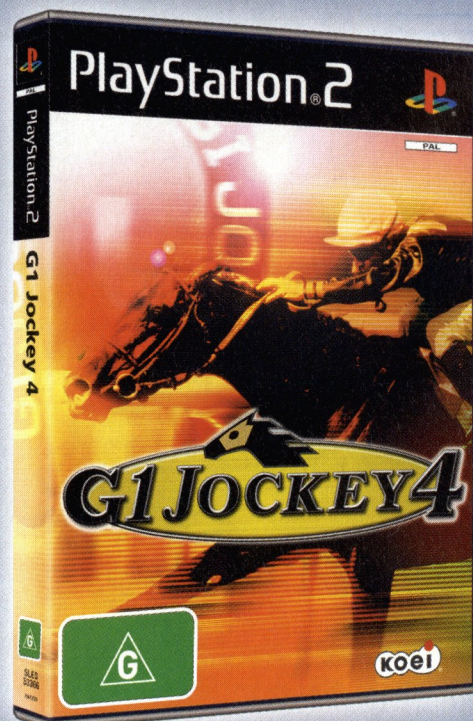


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NEXT-GEN SHOWCASE



CAM SHEA

DEAD RISING

One of the biggest 'movements' in videogames over the last few years has been towards the open-world style of game design. Led by the all conquering GTA series, while open-world games may have a linear narrative, they're designed to be a sandbox for the gamer to 'play' in. The end result (theoretically) are games with countless options to keep the player entertained, where you'll probably spend more time experimenting than doing actual missions.

Dead Rising is very much a game about experimentation and giving the player stacks of things to try, but it takes this foundation and gives it a hefty survival horror twist. It packs the player sardine-like into claustrophobic environments filled

to the brim with zombies, in addition to tempering the player's natural inquisitiveness with a constantly ticking clock. This is open-world gameplay as zombie pressure cooker, and it's pretty damn good.

IT'S ALWAYS A SLEEPY TOWN...

The setting is the mall in the sleepy town of Willamette in Colorado. It's a pretty massive complex, with five plazas, a food court, movie cinemas, parking areas and home saloon, all of which surround the Leisure Park — a large grassy area that sits in the centre of the complex. Why a mall? Well not only was the legendary zombie flick Dawn of the Dead set in a mall, but it gives Capcom a contained, structured environment to set the scene for survival, and an

excellent sandbox in which to play. But more on that later.

Your character is a photo journalist (and former war correspondent) named Frank West, who comes to Willamette after hearing that something strange is going on there. Apparently the army is blockading the town so he charts a helicopter and lands on the roof of the mall in search of the scoop of a lifetime. He has 72 hours to find out what's going on (not to mention survive) before the chopper comes back. So you'll be making your way around the mall, taking photos of what's going on, as well as coming into contact with trapped civilians and thousands upon thousands of zombies.

According to the legendary Keiji Inafune, the game's Executive

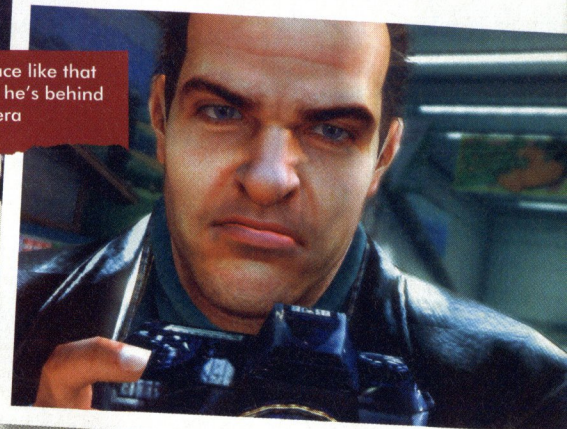
Producer, the reason West is a photo journalist is so that the team could create a situation "where a civilian, rather than a trained operative, had to use his wits and the objects he finds in the shops to survive. It also allowed us to introduce the picture taking feature that plays an important part in the game."

As a photo journalist, Frank's time in the mall will be conflicted. On the one hand, you're there for the scoop of a lifetime. You want photos of what's going on — it could make your career. Then there are the civilians trapped in the mall. Do you help them? Maybe they know more than they're letting on? Perhaps you can piece together how hell came to be unleashed on Willamette. Then again, maybe you'd be better off

SYSTEM: XBOX 360 ■ CATEGORY: ACTION ■ PLAYERS: 1 ■ DEVELOPER: CAPCOM ■ DUE: 2006



With a face like that it's lucky he's behind the camera



rescuing civilians all net you Prestige Points, and it's through Prestige Points that you can level up. This is an added incentive to complete non-critical objectives, as it will make your life a little easier in the mall. Among other things Frank will learn new hand to hand moves, such as leaping off walls, wrestling throws and even flip kicks.

TAKE A PICTURE, IT'LL LAST LONGER THAN YOU

While hand to hand moves are useful (there's nothing like running through a crowd of zombies delivering flying kicks to the head), it could be argued that the stars of Dead Rising are the objects Frank comes across and wields as makeshift weapons. These can be anything from garbage cans to cash registers, handbags, vases, sledgehammers, shotguns, potted plants and even mannequins. This is where the true anarchic joy of Dead Rising wades into the fray, and you'll spend huge tracts of time discovering how each pickup works, and which are the most useful.

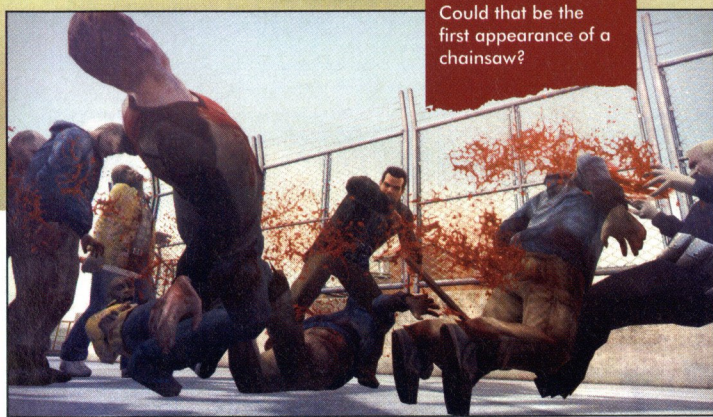
The chainsaw, for instance, isn't quite the uber weapon you may have assumed it would be. If a zombie manages to grab you when using the chainsaw you'll drop it. If you want to use it again you'll have to pick it up and start it, and that wastes valuable time as the zombie hordes close in. Still, when you do have the chainsaw up and running Frank takes huge arcing swings, cleaving off heads and torsos like he's cutting through butter. You can even run into zombies while it's idling. It won't kill them but you'll knock them back and create a little space.

The sledgehammer, on the other hand, is probably one of the most brutal weapons in the game, and like quite a number of the items you can pick up it has two methods of attack. Tap X and Frank will bring it down from on high, obliterating the skull of the zombie you're aiming for in a gratifying explosion of gore and crunchy sound effects. Hold X, however, and he'll swing it horizontally. It's a less powerful move but great for crowd clearing.

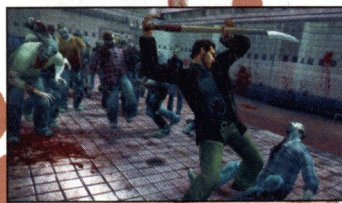
Some items you can use have

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Carrying a crate of vinyl for some Shaun of the Dead record flinging action.



Could that be the first appearance of a chainsaw?



just trying to survive.

The 72 hours in the game simply won't be enough time to do everything. So how will the game be structured? Inafune explained: "Dead Rising does not feature a system where players must complete mission 1 and then move onto mission 2, but features a number of scoops (sub missions) that the player can choose to complete if they wish. Throughout the game Frank will encounter various NPCs, and his situation will change dependent on your interaction with them. Some will provide key information to solving the mystery of

the zombie outbreak, but will Frank meet them? What happens in the 72 hours spent in the mall is up to the individual player."

The scoops that Inafune mentions are opportunities for you to be somewhere when something significant happens. Not just to capture it on film, but also to possibly learn more about what's going on. The game operates with a real-time clock, however, so you've only got a window of opportunity to get to each scoop. If you wait too long you'll miss it.

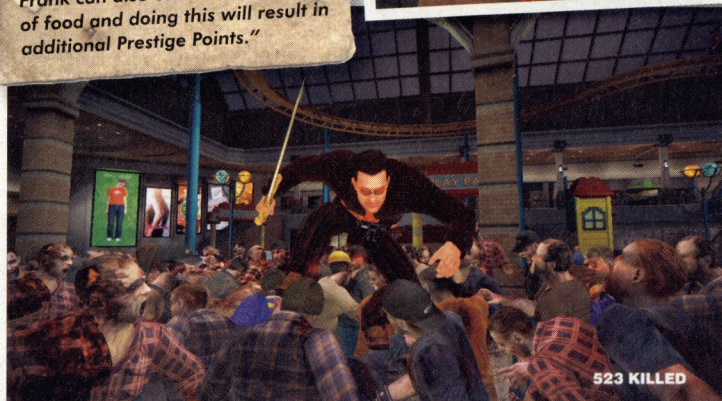
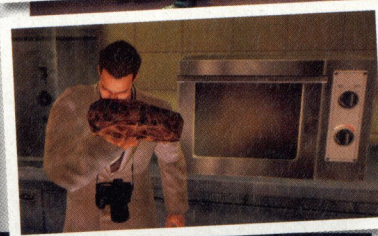
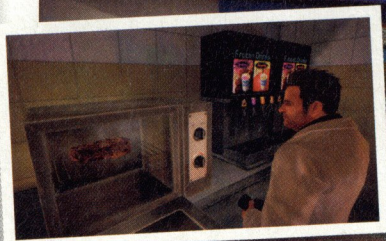
Scoops, getting good photos and

KNOW YOUR ZOMBIES!

What is it about Capcom and zombies? We asked Keiji Inafune: "I guess that zombies make good subject matter for a video game because they are essentially humans rather than monsters and therefore all the more terrifying."

KNOW YOUR RECIPES!

Food is an invaluable resource in *Dead Rising*. A bottle of wine or carton of milk for instance, will completely restore your health, while an apple or orange will at least ease the pain. That's only part of the story, however, as Inafune explained: "as time progresses some food stuffs may begin to go off and become spoilt, so be careful what you eat unless you want to get a bad stomach. Frank can also cook various items of food and doing this will result in additional Prestige Points."



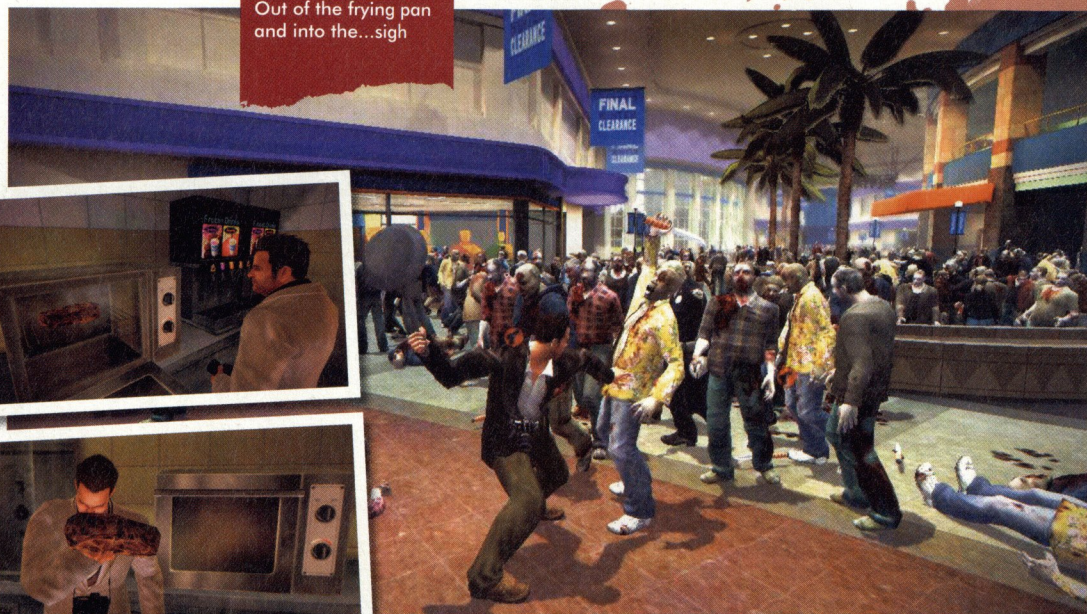
KNOW YOUR VISUALS!

Dead Rising is looking much more impressive than when we saw it at last year's E3. The main character in particular is less cartoony now, with a more forceful and realistic model. While the game does slow to a crawl at times, and certain surfaces have that shiny plastic sheen so many modern games do, the reality is that the code we played was a long way from complete, and what was in place was hugely impressive. Wading through hundreds and hundreds of enemies really does hit a new level that simply hasn't been possible until now. Capcom really seem to be getting to grips with the machine: "As this is Capcom's first title for the Xbox 360 we are using a brand new engine created from the ground up," Inafune told us, "The machine itself has been very great to work with and we have received great support from Microsoft which has made the process even smoother. In addition to ensure greater reality we have used Havok Physics middleware for the calculation of the movement of physical objects." *Dead Rising* is going to be a prankster's paradise.

quite unique functionality. A hockey stick, for instance, isn't for hitting zombies with, it's for caning pucks at their heads. Similarly, if you use a skateboard you'll actually ride it and theoretically knock zombies over. We say theoretically because the skateboard wasn't exactly finished in the code we played. Instead we'd almost immediately go into an elaborate and bizarre spinning fall animation. Should be fun when it's done though.

There are creative ways to use items too. Pick up a gas canister and throw it into the midst of an undead mosh pit, then shoot it and you can easily take out 20 or 30 in the explosion. We're hoping for some environmental interactivity too. It would be great to be able to drop light fixtures and the

Out of the frying pan
and into the...sigh

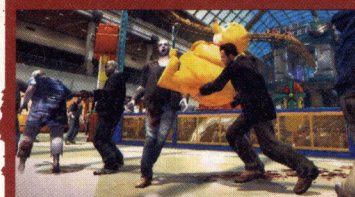


like on zombie heads.

Most melee weapons can be used repeatedly at close range but also thrown when you need to. Weapons aren't unlimited, either. Use your sledgehammer too much and eventually it will break. Fortunately, Frank can carry six items at a time (although that number may change as he levels up), so you'll constantly be juggling your items to have a good range. We recommend having at least one or two restorative items (food and drinks), one or two firearms (as much fun as sledgehammers and the like are, having a shotgun is still the most efficient way to kill zombies), one or two serious melee weapons, and of course, a couple of comedic weapons... just for fun. With around 120 stores in the mall, there's an awful lot of objects to test out in *Dead Rising*.

KILLING JEFF

It's not all zombie killing fun and games, however, as there are also over 100 civilians in the mall, and their safety is something that you can take upon yourself or ignore. "Frank's interaction with the NPCs adds the element of human drama to *Dead Rising*", Inafune notes. It also gives the team the chance to really get some unique



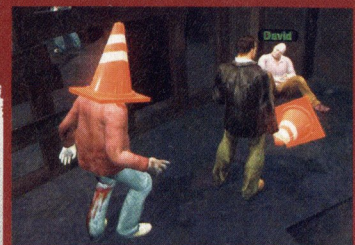
KNOW YOUR COMEDY!

Dead Rising has plenty of comedic elements and laugh out loud moment. Seeing zombies stumbling around with traffic cones on their heads for one is hilarious, as is using a giant cactus as a weapon, or jamming a shower fixture into a zombie's brain, leaving him shambling around with a constant stream of blood flowing out of the shower head. The list goes on and on. In keeping with the sandbox approach, most of the humorous moments aren't scripted. "What we have done is provide the player with the items to create comic situations, but we want to leave it up to them to experiment with these items," Inafune explained. "We have certainly had plenty of fun discovering innovative ways of defeating zombies."

We're also very keen to see a robust stat system in the game. We want to know how many zombies we've killed; with what weapons and whether they were decapitated and so on. While Inafune wouldn't reveal too much, he did say that "As with all Xbox 360 titles there will be Achievements to unlock and these will include various criteria such as the number of zombies killed." Cool.



Giant Zombie
Chipmunk loves you!



LIFE  PP  Lvl: 15

Zombie killing ZZ-Top style (as long as the guitar spins that is)



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Inafune told us that the game will have no co-op or multiplayer modes, but we think it's begging for at least some mini-games. Setting up elaborate traps for zombies in co-op to set off the most spectacular kill sequence would be gold!

642 KILLED

KNOW YOUR WEAPONS!

Just a handful of the weapons you'll be using in Dead Rising:

COATHANGER

Pretty ineffectual weapon right? Well yeah, but the visceral pleasure from jamming a coat hanger into the skull of a zombie makes it more than worth using.



PLATES

Having plates in your arsenal gives you an inexhaustible supply, and while Frank may fling them like a girl, if you can connect with a zombie head, they can be quite deadly. Brain exploding deadly. Miss, on the other hand, and it's like hitting them with wet newspaper.



FLUFFY TOYS

Cute, cuddly and deadly? Not exactly. You can bump zombies out of the way with a well timed swing, but that's about it.



TRAFFIC CONE

Comedy, thy name is the traffic cone, bucket and novelty hat! Zombies are pretty stupid right? If you obscure their vision they cease to be a threat. The best way to do that (aside from taking the head off altogether) is to jam something on there. So pick up that traffic cone and sneak up behind the nearest zombie and pop it on!



BEACH UMBRELLA

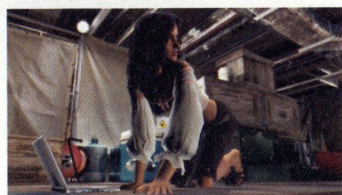
Psst. Want to know one of the best pickups in the game? Look no further. Just lower a beach umbrella and charge. You'll knock zombies flying and carve a path for yourself.



characters in the game: "as in real life, the NPCs have different characteristics and therefore act differently to the situation they find themselves in. Some NPCs will actively fight back against the zombies, while others will be found cowering in corners waiting to be rescued; Frank will even have to fight some of them as they have been driven insane."

In our time with the game we partnered up with Jeff, a rather ordinary pink shirted fellow who needed to be reunited with his wife. Once he's decided to follow you, he'll automatically sit on your heel, although you can set waypoints if need be. Jeff wasn't the basket case some of the NPCs become, and if in danger would quite happily start swinging away with his chosen weapon, the middle-aged mace: a gold club. Of course, curiosity to see Jeff's demise overcame altruism, and we let the zombies descend. In classic Romero style they overwhelmed him and proceeded to claw open his chest and feast on the goo inside.

And believe us when we tell you, there is no way to get away from the zombies, and no way to kill them all. Aside from the security room they're literally everywhere and numbering in the thousands, if not tens of thousands. The zombies in this game are a malevolent and unconquerable



tide that you can fight against but never hope to overcome. Good thing they're not that smart.

Still, that's beside the point, as Inafune explains: "The zombies are not able to climb, open doors or drive, but you have to remember, in Dead Rising Frank is not faced by just one or two zombies at a time, but hundreds of them and this is far more frightening." This system means that while zombies can follow you, they're not going to be working together to get you. Even so, it's amazing how quickly you can get surrounded, how fast some zombies can close the gap between you, and how intense it is trying to move through areas with so many zombies. Capcom have obviously worked hard to ensure that the challenge is just right. Inafune elaborates: "It is thanks to the power of the Xbox 360 that we have been able to develop a system that we call 'swarm technology' that not only allows us to display hundreds of zombies at any one time, but also provides realistic movement and behaviour." Of course, because the game has a real-time clock ticking

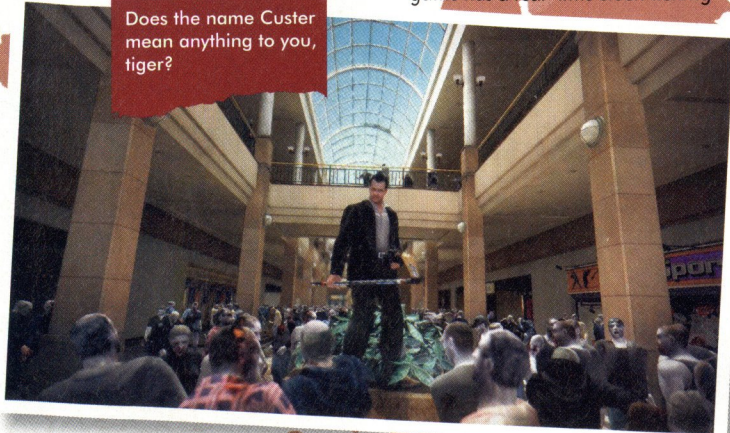


down, you'll be spending several nights in the mall, and Capcom are knocking their swarm technology up a notch for those times: "At night the zombies become far more active — moving quicker and attacking with more ferocity," Inafune told us. And let's not forget their glowing red eyes piercing the darkness.

THE DEMONS INSIDE

As freaky as the undead are, it seems to us at this stage that it will be other humans that provide the equivalent of boss battles in this game. In one mission we had to venture from the security room to the pharmacy at the opposite end of the mall to bring back back medicine for a sick survivor. This meant making our way through plazas, a food court, a section still under construction and across the Leisure Park. Overcoming the hordes and hordes of zombies required skill and luck in equal measure, but there was always a way to get through. Once we got to the supermarket/pharmacy, however, we came across another 'human' survivor, an insane shopkeeper packing a shotgun and shopping trolley studded with swords and pitchforks. How do you tackle this situation? It's a given that the zombies are fodder for your arsenal, but what about other humans, however mad and homicidal they may be? This scene is the perfect example that Capcom aren't going to let you settle in Dead Rising. Just as you get into the groove they throw you a curveball. Just as it should be. <<

Does the name Custer mean anything to you, tiger?



NEXT-GEN SHOWCASE



ALEXANDER JAMES BURKE

STRANGLEHOLD

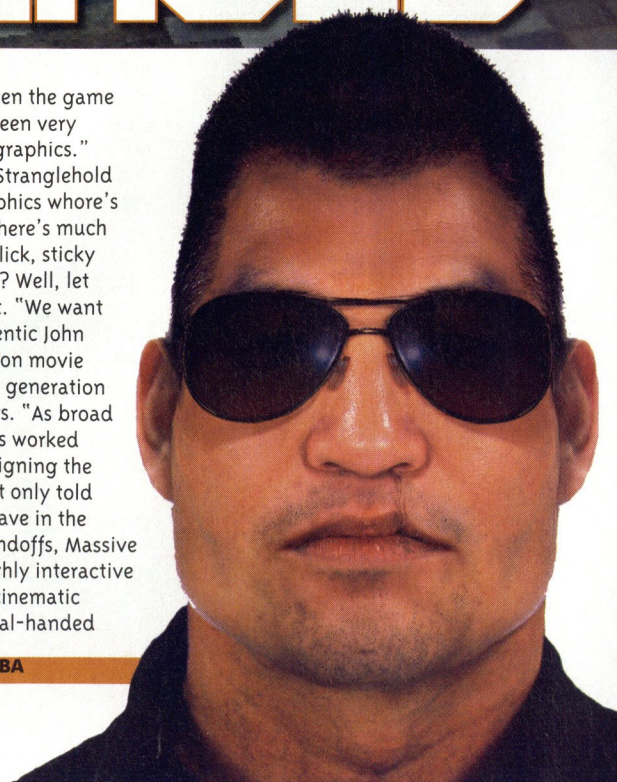
Ah, Tequila. It's a top-notch liver-lacerator, and if you're into wrapping your Mazda Rx3 'round a tree on weekends, it might just be the ticket. Turns out the drink also shares its name with an Aztec city, a song by The Pretenders, and a forgettable golden-age rock band. Oh, yeah, and Tequila also happens to be the moniker adopted by Chow Yun Fat's arse-kicker of a cop in what is considered by some to be John Woo's greatest film: *Hard Boiled*. These days, though, "blood operas" just ain't enough for Fat and Woo. Nope, they're into videogames, and guess what — Tequila's coming along for the ride. So Hyperinos, brace yourselves for Stranglehold.

TEQUILA SHOOTERS

This probably isn't the first time you've heard of — or at least seen — Midway's upcoming actioner. The reason? It was one of the oh-so-pre-rendered 'games' that earned the PlayStation's third incarnation a hearty dose of criticism. Luckily, now, all has been forgiven, and Stranglehold still looks stunning — it's running on a mucho-tweaked version of the Unreal Engine 3. Alex Offerman, the game's producer, elaborates: "We are using a highly modified version of the Unreal Engine 3 that allows us to create amazingly detailed environments, incredibly realistic characters, and have huge numbers of special effects on-screen, while running in wide-screen and in high-definition.

Everyone who has seen the game running so far has been very impressed with the graphics."

Mind you, whilst Stranglehold is looking like a graphics whore's furtive wet dream, there's much more to it than the slick, sticky visuals. In a nutshell? Well, let Offerman spell it out. "We want to recreate the authentic John Woo Hong Kong action movie experience as a next generation video game," he says. "As broad as that sounds, it has worked well for us while designing the game, because it not only told us what we should have in the game — Mexican Standoffs, Massive D., Tequila Time, highly interactive environments, and cinematic 'Akimbo' smooth dual-handed



SYSTEM: PC/PS3/XBOX 360 ■ CATEGORY: ACTION ■ PLAYERS: 1 ■ DEVELOPER: MIDWAY ■ DUE: TBA



UNROOOL

We've all heard the complaints from Carmack, Newell, and other assorted developers. Yep, dual-core processors and bad development kits aren't the kinds of things you send a designer for his birthday. Next-gen consoles sure look great, but they're mighty troublesome. So, how's the Stranglehold team been finding developing for the X360, PS3, and PC? "Developing the first Midway game for next-gen consoles and PC has been challenging," Offerman admits, "but we are making good progress and got a head start by using the Unreal Engine 3. In terms of which platforms have been more difficult to design for, I'd have to say that none of them have been any more difficult or easy than the others. We are developing all three simultaneously, and they are all challenging because we are constantly trying to push them to their limits."

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A level in which a baby pisses on Tequila to put out a fire....

Chow once again shows his contempt for gravity



gun-play - but also helped us to keep focused on what is important, by cutting out anything that does not fit the John Woo movie experience."

You might wonder how they're being so precise. Well, it always helps to have John Woo himself on the team. And Woo's more than happy about what's being done with Stranglehold. "Being able to visualize choreography without limitations from actors or from CG film budgets is liberating," he gushes. "My son has always been good at videogames. By bringing my ideas to this medium I feel like I am able to have a greater connection with the younger generations. They can take my idea and create their own adventure from it."

Not only is Woo content with

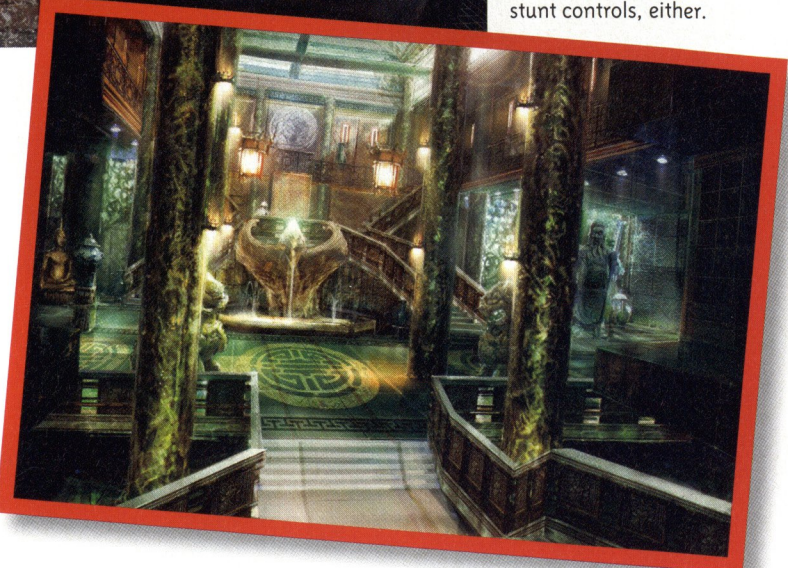
how the team's treating his IP, he's actually had a lot of fun actually working on Stranglehold. "The process has only just begun," he notes, "but I have enjoyed working on the story, the graphic design of the characters, and discussing ideas with the designer. Most of the creative work comes from the genius minds at Midway. They know my style and use it to develop great stuff. They know the game world the best. I'm very happy with what they have come up with."

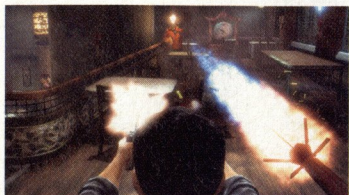
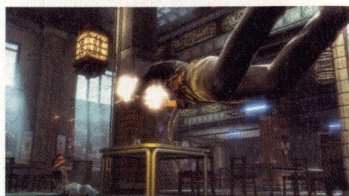
For the sceptics in the audience, Offerman explains exactly what Mr.

Woo has contributed to the project. "John Woo has contributed a lot of art, animation and cinema direction, and has been extremely involved in the writing of the story. We are trying to recreate his vision in the game, so we regularly meet with him to review the latest version of Stranglehold, and get his feedback, which is always very insightful. Even when it comes to areas that he is not very involved in, like game-play design, he still often has a comment that adds to that aspect

of the game, like how an animation could be done that would make a special move in the game more dramatic and impacting."

Those dramatic special moves are hugely important to Stranglehold's design. Just as Woo's films are infested with acrobatic, balletic, and violent stunts, so will be his first foray into gaming. You won't need eighteen fingers to master the stunt controls, either.





WOO! Hey, look, John Woo may be able to supply *Stranglehold* with its look and feel, but what about the gameplay? From where has the team taken inspiration, if at all? Offerman has all the answers. "Games, like all art forms, are iterative," he says, "and we've taken inspiration from many other titles, including the last game the team worked on, *Psi-Ops*. We learned a great deal about both what to do and what not to do in a third-person action game while working on *Psi-Ops*, which we've used as the basis for *Stranglehold*. In addition to that, we've been playing and taking notes on what other games do right, especially other shooting games, so that our combat flows, is intuitive, and, most importantly, fun!"



Walk softly and carry a large caliber handgun



"Acrobatic stunts — and using the environment to assist you with those stunts — are one of *Stranglehold*'s core gameplay elements. We make it clear to the player when they can interact with those objects by subtly highlighting them. If the highlight is on, and you press the interact button, an interaction will always happen. If it is not on, no interaction occurs, and Tequila will dive instead. It is straightforward and easy to do, but the results look like complex stunts and stunt combos.

"In a typical example, Tequila can be running along a second floor railing, taking out enemies below, when a chandelier comes into view. It will highlight to show it is 'interactable', and then the player just hits the interact button. Tequila will jump out, grab on to it, and beginning swinging while still being able to aim and fire at enemies. Then, the player can have Tequila drop to the ground — even on the head of an enemy, taking him out — or jump to the second floor on the other side of the room. It may sound a little complex, but it actually feels very intuitive! We want you to concentrate on the smooth flowing gunplay action and not fumble with controller buttons."

You shouldn't rely on the environment too much, though, because it may just come to pieces before you've slapped on your jumping gloves. Why's that, you ask? Well, it all comes down to the second most important part of *Stranglehold* — fully destructible environments, or, as Midway's referring to it, "Massive Destructability". "Nearly everything you see in the environments that you can imagine being destructible actually is," Offerman exclaims. "It's a big part of not only the look and feel of the game, but also the gameplay, as there will be many points where using the destructible environments will be critical to beating a mission. We're using the Havok Physics Engine, and so we utilize real-time physics extensively

throughout the entire game.

"Players will not be disappointed by the amount of destruction they can cause in *Stranglehold*. For instance, Hong Kong is famous for its 'Stilt Cities', which are communities made up of mostly wooden ramshackle houses built side-by-side and on top of each other on actual stilts over the water. That kind of environment, combined with our 'Massive D.' system, leads to gameplay where players are moving through buildings by destroying walls, fighting enemies above and below them, as roofs and floors collapse around them — new areas open up as buildings are blown apart.

"We have a level set in Chicago that takes place in an ultra-modern penthouse, filled with artworks, overlooking the city. Here, Tequila could come running down a flight of stairs, and jump onto a piece of artwork suspended from the ceiling, while he fights enemies on levels above and below him. As the artwork is blown away literally piece

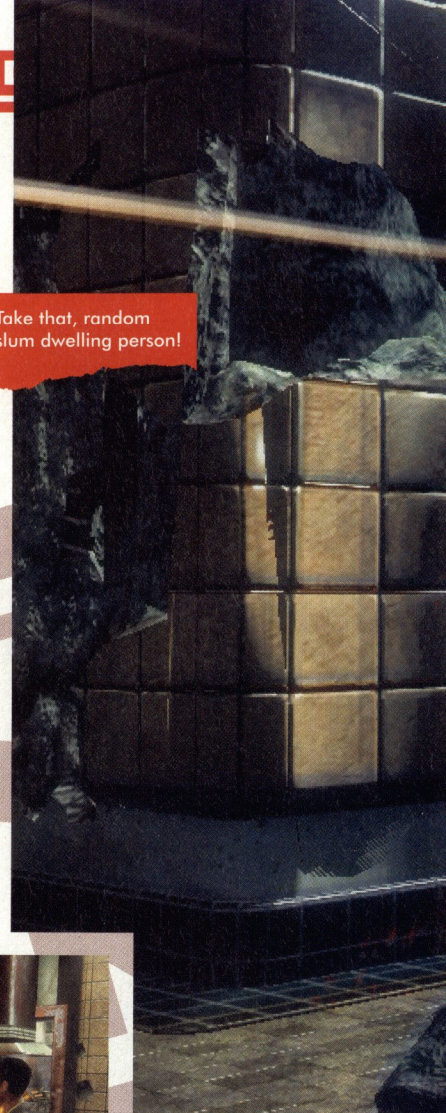


by piece beneath him, he keeps one step ahead as the glass, sculptures and lights explode from bullets flying all over the room. We've made many of our environments multi-level, so that the player is moving and fighting not only on the horizontal but also on the vertical."

Never has the old adage, "F*ck art, let's dance", been more pertinent.

It won't just be Stilt Cities and smart-town apartments that you'll be blowing to ugly chunks; *Stranglehold*'s all about rearranging a wide variety of environments in style. Offerman lets in on what you'll be witnessing. "Tequila will find himself in many different environments," he remarks, "throughout both Hong Kong and Chicago. Some of the Hong Kong environments include the previously mentioned Stilt City, where ramshackle wooden houses have been built out on the water, the Mega Restaurant, a fancy restaurant boat that serves as the headquarters for one of the Chinese gangs in the game, and the Marketplace, which includes a recreation of *Hard Boiled*'s famous teahouse. Some of

Take that, random slum dwelling person!



Chicago's environments include a museum, and the penthouse. Players will also have a number of environments for driving gameplay,

using boats, motorcycles, and cars."

Of course, Midway don't want their game to be lobotomised gun-blasting; they've got a licence to honour! As such, there's a story to tie all the "Massive D." together. Offerman spoons it out like Mary Poppins after hitting Kate Moss' personal stash. "The back-story is that James Wong has controlled the most powerful triad in Hong Kong for 30 years, but his position is threatened when his daughter and granddaughter are kidnapped by a rival gang. So, he's forced to enlist his former son-in-law, HKPD Detective Tequila Yuen — played by Chow Yun Fat. Tequila is caught in the crossfire of powerful rival triads while he searches from the slums of Hong Kong to the streets of Chicago to save his wife and the daughter he never knew."

What's more, both Woo and Midway have confirmed you can consider *Stranglehold*'s storyline a canonical sequel to *Hard Boiled*. "Stranglehold is the spiritual sequel to *Hard Boiled*," Offerman states, "and we are working closely with John Woo and Chow Yun Fat on the game to make it as authentic to



the characters and world of *Hard Boiled* as possible."

Part of how they're going to make those characters authentic — other than some hopefully decent writing, and, hey, it doesn't hurt to have Chow Yun Fat on voice-acting duties — is through some sexy new AI. In *Stranglehold*, your enemies won't just exercise a single, "one-size-fits-all-but-those-addicted-to-Krispy-Kreme" strategy; they'll be working with their feelings, man. They've come to terms with their emotions, and they've learned how to use them. (Guess they had a good therapist who didn't mind — well, you know, all that killing.)

Offerman is rapt with the results. "*Stranglehold*'s AI is capable of a lot of very realistic actions that real people would do," he reveals, "like using cover while they fire, coordinating attacks with each other, and, in special cases, interacting with the environments, just like the player. And many of their reactions are based on human emotions, like fear, anger, curiosity and revenge. Our goal has been to make the most realistic AI possible for players."

If you're going to make a John Woo game, though, you need more than clever baddies. Yep, in order to complete the experience, you've

got to dabble in the slow-mo. But this ain't your regular slow-mo: it's "Tequila Time"! "Tequila Time" has two play modes," Offerman explains, "auto, or manual. In auto mode, slow-mo is automatically turned on and off when players are doing cool interactions / stunts with objects in the environments. Pulling off interactions and stunts that put you into Tequila Time is also very advantageous to the player for multiple reasons. The

BOTH WOO AND MIDWAY HAVE CONFIRMED YOU CAN CONSIDER STRANGLEHOLD'S STORYLINE A CANONICAL SEQUEL TO HARD BOILED

best way to explain this is to give you an example: if Tequila were to slide down a banister, and then dive through the air while targeting enemies, the game would automatically go into Tequila Time, which not only gives players the advantage of being able to aim normally while everyone else is in slow-motion, but also allows players to deliver more damage with their shots and receive more 'style points' from their kills. Many players will like auto mode, because it allows them to concentrate more on aiming and shooting, rather

than managing Tequila Time.

"Other players prefer managing their Tequila Time directly, so they have the option of using the manual mode, where they directly control turning Tequila Time on and off when and where they see fit. However, once all of your Tequila Time is used up, it takes some time to regenerate, so it has to be used wisely. Either way, interacting with objects and using Tequila Time to take out enemies in cool ways gets you style points, that ultimately can be used to pull off special 'Tequila Bomb' attacks. One of them allows you to take out lots of enemies all at once in a very cool, cinematic way."

You can't blame Offerman for his addiction to the adjective "cinematic". More than just making clear *Stranglehold* will stay true to John Woo's filmic legacy, he wants to emulate what the audience experiences when watching one of the director's "blood operas". Will he succeed? Well, everything he's explained so far sounds promising. Either way, there's no doubt we'll all be filling Tequila's shoes very soon. No word yet on whether you should be drinking the hard stuff when you're playing it, though. <<

MOOFIES *Stranglehold's* obviously trying to bridge the game-movie divide, like so many have attempted before. Will they be successful? Who knows, but there's little doubt they're going to need a whole lotta faith in the interactive medium, so their game doesn't end up like some cheesy Van-Damme flick interspersed with banal "interactive" gunfire. Is *Stranglehold* taking advantage of videogaming's interactivity? Does he believe games, as an artistic medium, have anything over films? (Do I ask too many abstruse questions?) Offerman patiently replies. "I wouldn't say that gaming has anything over film or other mediums when it comes to story telling, but it does allow for stories to be told in new and different ways. Most other media are fairly static and non-interactive, while video games can be very dynamic and usually require a lot of interaction on the player's part to advance the story. I think that potentially there will be a genre of games with no scripted events or storylines, and the stories will be completely driven and created by the player."

NEXT-GEN SHOWCASE

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

Unreal Tournament is a funny game. In some ways, it's old-fashioned — a relic of the Quake deathmatch era that's somehow managed to retain enough of a following to justify mods, sequels and Xbox exclusive spin-offs. On the other hand, it's incredibly up-to-date with the latest industry trends, and more than capable of standing up to the might of competitors like Counter-Strike and Call of Duty with its own selection of team-based game modes.

And now Epic is working on Unreal Tournament 2007; a game which not only promises to move everything over to an updated engine and add lots of new content, but to make some much-needed changes to the series' most basic gameplay mechanics.

When it comes to accessibility, the Unreal Tournament series has always been a little lacking. Unreal Tournament 2004 in particular was incredibly fast-paced. As a newbie, it was intimidating: you'd join a deathmatch server and see players jumping all over the place; literally bouncing off the walls as they vaporised each other with shock combos and flak shells. Onslaught wasn't so bad seeing the maps were far more open and everyone was equally new, but the indoor stuff was a bitch.


MOVE YOUR ARSE

Thankfully, Epic is aware of this problem and hopes to correct it with some of the changes they're making in Unreal Tournament 2007. Jeff

Morris, the game's producer, says, "Our goal was to balance the feel of the original Unreal Tournament with that of Unreal Tournament 2004. We've tried to make the combat much



SYSTEM: PC/PS3 ■ CATEGORY: FPS ■ PLAYERS: 1-MULTI ■ DEVELOPER: EPIC ■ DUE: TBA



I think his rocket launcher is melting

CONSOLE TOURNAMENT

Unreal Tournament 2007 won't just be on PC: it's going to be released for PlayStation 3. "There will be differences between the PC version and console versions, but the underlying gameplay will be the same."

It's been suggested that it will be a launch title, but the lack of a solid release date means no one is really sure if this will actually be the case.

Unfortunately for all you Xbox 360 owners, it looks as if you're going to miss out. But hey, it's not all bad – you're going to get Gears of War, after all.

weapon called the Canister Gun.

Epic wants to make sure that each of the weapons and, for that matter, each of the firing modes feels suitably unique. Morris hopes that fans will accept and appreciate the changes the team has made.

"We're making tweaks to a lot of the existing weapons and there will be a few new additions," he told us.

A lot of the changes to the combat mechanics will be far more subtle than simply introducing new guns or ditching superfluous ones. "We're adding lots of new features [...] and new pickups like the Helmet, which protect against headshots. And that's just scratching the surface."

The weapons in Unreal Tournament will look better than ever before, featuring many more visible moving parts than in the previous games. When you're using the Rocket Launcher, for example, you'll be able to watch as rockets get loaded into each of the weapon's three barrels and locked into place.

Unsurprisingly, vehicles will be making a return from Unreal Tournament 2004 for the Onslaught and, presumably, Conquest modes. Early reports suggested that they may also appear in some Capture the Flag maps. "We've got two teams of vehicles," Morris says, "the Axon and the Necris. A nice thing about our vehicles is that they aren't necessarily parallel in function between the teams. Our 18 vehicles all play very differently and offer a lot of diverse gameplay from each other."

If you've played Unreal Tournament 2004, you've seen at least some of the Axon team's vehicles. While the complete line-up isn't confirmed yet, we do know that the Hellbender, Raptor, Scorpion, Manta, Goliath, Cicada, Paladin and SPMA will be back. If the last three sound unfamiliar, it's because they were added to the game some months after its release in the Editor's Choice edition.

For those of you who'd left the Tournament scene by then, the

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
The return of Tokara Forest!

more grounded, ensuring closer combat distances and toning down of some of the extreme movement options from later incarnations of the franchise. Another benefit of this was to ensure that newer players were able to at least see the person fragging them, rather than wondering where the three rockets that just splashed them all over the floor came from."

Perhaps the most troublesome of the movement options Morris speaks about is the dodge, which has been a part of the Unreal franchise since the very beginning. It's pretty self-explanatory – you simply double-tap a movement key to get launched a short distance in that direction. It's handy for avoiding slow-moving projectiles such as rockets and grenades, as well as for leaping out of the way of oncoming vehicles.

The idea itself is fine, it's just that Unreal Tournament 2004 made it so powerful that it became something else entirely. Players who'd mastered the technique were basically able to fly around the map, circling and killing slower opponents with their feet rarely touching the ground. In Unreal Tournament 2007, this ability will be toned down considerably – hardcore deathmatch veterans mightn't like it, but it's desperately needed if the game is to build a bigger following in an overcrowded market.

Most of the changes Epic is planning aren't so obvious. They're keen on making the experience of moving around the environment far more tactile than it has been in the past. When you're running, they want it feel as if your character's feet are making contact with a solid

surface as opposed to floating a few centimetres above the ground.

This sort of thing will also carry over to the vehicles. Thanks to the wonders of Unreal Engine 3.0, the Goliath will now actually feel like a lumbering battle tank and interact with the environment accordingly.

GUNS, LOTS OF GUNS

When it comes to the arsenal, it looks as if the Shock Rifle, Rocket Launcher, Link Gun, Impact Hammer, Flak Cannon, Sniper Rifle, Redeemer, AVRil and Enforcers will be returning from previous games in the series. The Minigun has been replaced by the Stinger, the fully automatic shared gun which appeared in Unreal and Unreal Championship 2. The Bio Rifle, Grenade Launcher and Spider Mine Launcher, on the other hand, have been combined into a single

MAKING THINGS UNREAL

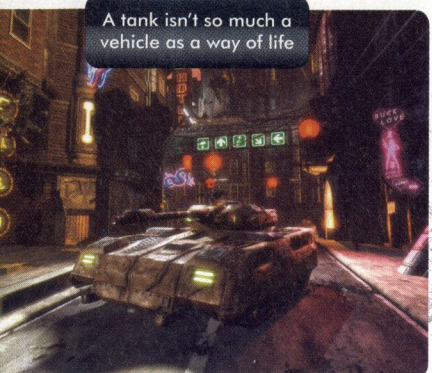
After seeing how successful mods like *Red Orchestra* and *Frag Ops* were, Epic is planning to support the Unreal Tournament community even more this time around.

"It's easy to think of Unreal Engine 3 as just graphics, but it offers a vast number of improvements in the SDK we'll ship with for mod users. These include more powerful tools, like our particle editor, as well as easier to use implementations of previous features, such as our visual scripting language Kismet."

No word yet on if Epic is going to do another Make Something Unreal contest (<http://www.unrealtournament.com/ut2003/contest.php>), but rest assured that our fingers and toes are crossed.



A tank isn't so much a vehicle as a way of life



Cicada was an air vehicle. It was slower than the Raptor and less suited to air-to-air combat, but it was simply devastating against ground targets. The Paladin, on the other hand, was a light tank. While it didn't have the firepower of the Goliath, it could project a neat little force field to protect it and nearby friendlies from enemy fire. And finally, the SPMA was a mobile artillery battery. It was painfully slow and vulnerable to just about everything, but it was capable of striking enemy targets before they were in visual range.

A few of the vehicles have undergone some fairly drastic changes. The Scorpion, for example, now sports a self-destruct mechanism. Now, if you're faced with a tank you can simply speed towards it, hit the detonate button, jump out and sit back to watch the fireworks.

And then there's the Necris gear. Epic isn't giving away any specific details at the moment, but we do know that you can expect vehicles that are incredibly alien both in appearance and in terms of how they behave. They're supposed to look quite gothic — that may sound odd, but it would fit perfectly into the Unreal Tournament universe.

The only new vehicle we have details on at this stage is the hoverboard, which Morris explains is designed to give players the ability to move from their spawn point to where the action is quickly and easily. It's the sort of thing that Onslaught desperately needs, especially on larger maps such as Red Planet. Here's hoping it reduces the problem of people standing around the base at the start of the game, waiting for a Manta or Scorpion to spawn so they don't have to walk.

COMMAND AND CONQUER

Epic isn't giving too much away about Unreal Tournament 2007's game modes either. "All the classic game types like deathmatch, team deathmatch and capture the flag are returning," Morris says. "Onslaught was a huge hit in Unreal Tournament 2004, so it'll be back with a vengeance. There are a few others."

So far, the only new game mode we've heard about is Conquest. Originally, it was reported that Conquest was all about large-scale campaigns that were fought across several maps. The maps were to be absolutely huge, with a series of Assault-style objectives for both teams to complete. How a team performed in one round would determine their situation in the next. For example, if you were absolutely trounced on one map, you might find yourself starting the next without access to certain vehicles or weapons.



It was and still is an intriguing idea, but Morris refuses to give away any more details. "We're still fooling around with ideas about Conquest and aren't quite ready to take the wraps off yet," he says. "When we come up with ideas for a new game type, a lot of the time they're useful enough to benefit other game types and get merged into them. Other ideas that are for existing game types change the mechanics so much, they often get thought of as a new game. It's a balancing act but we're happy with the results so far."

No matter your preferred game mode, Epic is promising some excellent maps for Unreal

small part of a much larger battle.

In-game environments will now offer a limited amount of destructibility. While you won't be able to turn a map into a massive concrete block of Swiss cheese, you'll certainly be able to use rockets and the like to take sizable chunks out of the walls. On some maps, you'll have the ability to damage 'softer' things like catwalks.

ON THE FLY

The only time you'll encounter a loading screen in Unreal Tournament 2007 is when you join a server or start a single player game. Once you're connected, the maps are loaded on the fly — when one ends, you'll find yourself magically transported to the next.

It may sound odd, but Unreal Tournament's single player has always been immensely popular. As such, the team is putting a lot

of work into it this time around. "With our improved AI, adding distinct personalities to the bots and the ability to use your voice to communicate with the AI, we feel we've captured the feel of online play in single player better than ever before. We're not ready to discuss it in detail yet, but it will expand upon what's worked in the past for offline play." In other words, a sports game-style ladder that lets you create your own Tournament team by hiring, firing and trading different characters.

At the moment, no release date has been set, with Epic preferring to adopt 3D Realms' maxim of "when it's done." Realistically, though, you can expect it some time late this year or early next year.

But with improved accessibility, a new game mode and some damn sexy graphics, Unreal Tournament 2007 is going to be absolutely huge whenever it's released. ☼

THE HOVERBOARD... GIVES PLAYERS THE ABILITY TO MOVE FROM THEIR SPAWN POINT TO THE ACTION QUICKLY AND EASILY

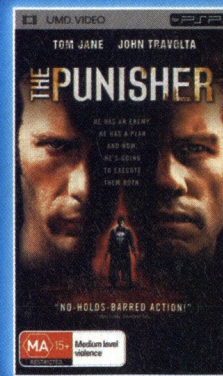
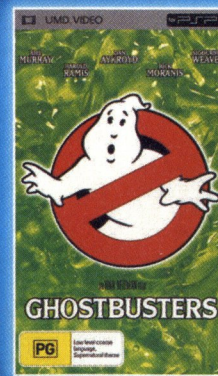
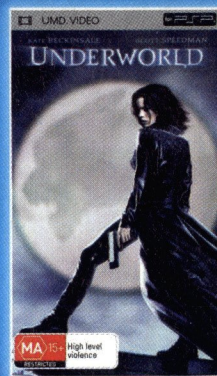
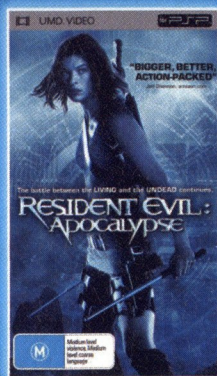
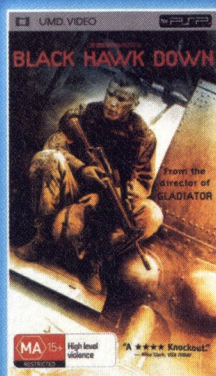
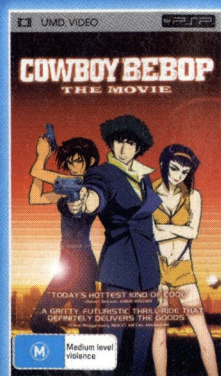
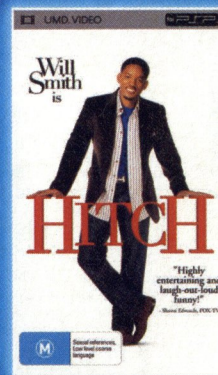
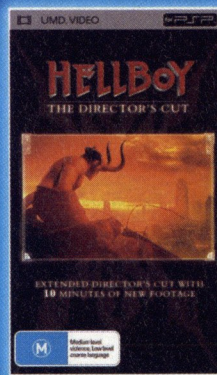
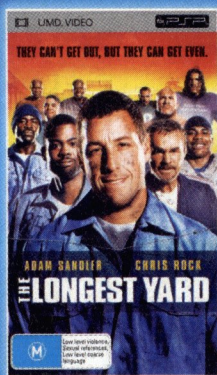
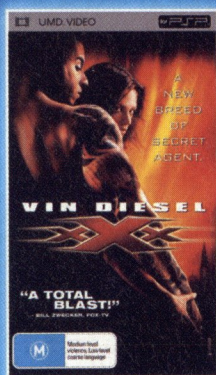
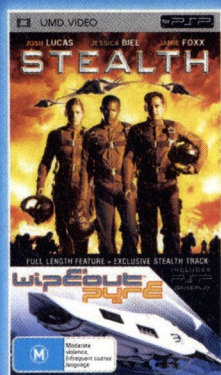
Tournament 2007. After receiving criticism about the "plasticity" look of early screenshots, they've begun the process of "grungifying" (their words, not ours) the in-game environments. As a result, everything looks far grittier and more realistic.

Special care is being taken to ensure that the maps feel as if they're part of a larger world rather than isolated arenas designed solely for the purpose of blood sports. One map, for example, is set in a robot factory. As you run through the different rooms, you'll be able to watch robots being put together, painted and packaged for shipping. If you go outside, you'll see the city and, if you look hard enough, the area where the next map is set. Some of the maps Epic has planned sound absolutely spectacular, like the one that's set aboard a spaceship that's under attack or the one that recreates a skirmish that's but a

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NEXT-GEN SHOWCASE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS II

ED DAWSON

Neverwinter Nights is a game series that holds the benchmark standard for authentic Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying, especially in multiplayer. The original and its expansions were hugely popular, due to the game's excellent multiplayer engine and the ease with which fans could create their own challenges and adventures. There was a virtual waterfall of mods and user-created scenarios, which extended the game's useful playtime for many moons after its release. The expansion packs added incremental improvements and new single-player campaigns. As the new game is set to launch in Q3 of 2006, the strengths of the original seem to be returning in force,

with a fearsome cast of big-name development personalities driving its evolution.

Originally a side-project that Bioware self-funded, Neverwinter Nights II is being created by Santa Ana, California based Obsidian Entertainment. Obsidian is staffed by writers and designers from the classic Baldur's Gate and Knights of the Old Republic II. Does that make this next project exciting? Oh yes. Yes it does. Hyper caught up with Obsidian CEO, Feargus Urquhart for a chat and guided tour through the all-new Neverwinter sequel.

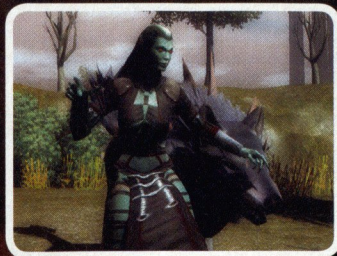
DODGING THE CLICHES

In terms of the story and quest design, Feargus was quick to emphasise that the Obsidian team

are going out of their way to avoid clichés: "In every RPG, you're this guy off the street, and you go kill the giant thing. Almost every single RPG could be brought down to that." Rather than following the tried and true, their approach is to carefully structure everything the player is doing so that it has an obvious and direct link to the story's events. Feargus continued: "It's not just about getting the next item, the next experience points and the next level. It's about earning people's respect in the world and about how the world is reacting to what you're doing". Plenty of other games force to you go and fetch random objects in what



SYSTEM: PC ■ CATEGORY: RPG ■ PLAYERS: 1-64 (ONLINE) ■ DEVELOPER: OBSDIAN ENTERTAINMENT ■ DUE: Q3 2006



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

How about an ass-kicking six armed snake thing with red skin? Oh wait, they've already got one.

interesting point, but no matter how an RPG is designed, you'll always miss out on something, and in the case of NNII your character's alignment allows different access to quests and conversation options, depending on what shape it takes. Fortunately, that just gives you an excuse to play through a few times.

Going back to the topic of moral decisions, Deekin the Kobold is no longer your companion. It seems that he levelled up too extensively during the Hordes of the Underdark campaign, while the heroes in Neverwinter Nights II start back at the very bottom of the experience tree. Adding Deekin to that party, Feargus explained, wouldn't make sense.

FIRED FROM THE D&D CANON

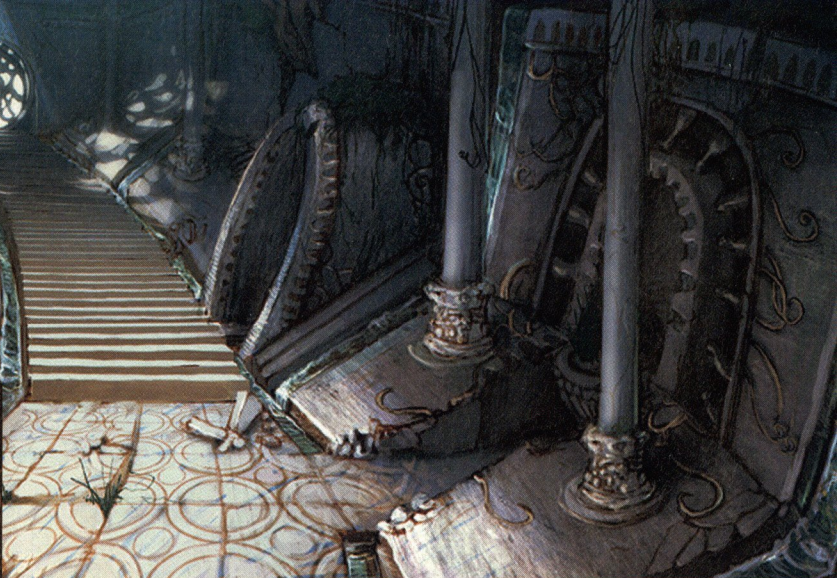
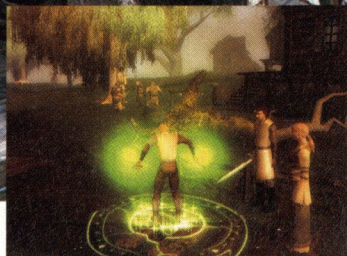
Using the Dungeons & Dragons version 3.5 rules, the Obsidian designers were in close contact with the Wizards of the Coast, owners of the D&D system. When the rules didn't suit the game, they adjusted them slightly with Wizards' approval. Having said that, the game goes closer to a complete picture of D&D than any game preceding it. The Forgotten Realms sub-races are now all included, except for the "psychic halflings" as Feargus described them and water & fire sub-races of humans. However, the Special Races made it in, such as the Drow, using D&D rules of



can only be described as lazy quest design, and Feargus was keen to point out that this won't be one of them. Although item collection is a type of quest they are using Feargus explained that it has more relevance than it typically would: "It could be that there's a quest of 'go get me a coffee', but the idea is perhaps because you're trying to impress someone".

According to Feargus, the Ultima games - particularly Ultima 4 - are a good example of adventure games where your quests and actions were driven by a number of factors, not just item collection. "For instance, in Ultima when you were trying to be compassionate, you wouldn't attack Neutral things. You could still go and attack them, but the game created this rule system where you were penalised for doing

things differently". So how about the good and evil decisions in the KOTOR series? Will that kind of decision making would be featured in Neverwinter Nights II? "It's a moral decision thing. Do you do this, or do you do that, and let the puppy die. You know, in all of our games we always include a certain amount of that". We get the impression however that this feature won't be as central a theme as in KOTOR II. Feargus elaborated, "what we find is that sometimes, what people do when they come to these moral decisions is that they save their game, and then they try them all out. While that's fine, a part of me says 'Is that what we want to happen?'. In essence that we make them feel like they're missing too much by presenting them with too many moral decisions". An



level handicap. These characters need substantially more experience points to attain each level than other races do, in order to balance the half-races' unique powerful abilities. The Warlock is a new class and Bards are now more effective in combat, with their enchanted music having a greater effect on parties' attributes than previously. In character generation, the game uses a point-buy system. This is weighted, so that it costs two points to go from 10-12, and the costs escalate as your attribute reaches max. You can't simply sink all your points into one attribute and max it out at the beginning. On each screen of the character selection you'll find a 'recommended' button, allowing green RPG players to choose the 'safest' option. You can totally customise your character's appearance such as facial details, hair and skin as well as choose from six pre-fabricated options per race and sex.

REAL PURTY

With the introduction out of the way, it was time for Feargus to show us the game in action. Our *Neverwinter Nights II* demo began by taking a stroll through a medieval village in the new graphics engine. A drastic departure from the old engine, we were presented with a bright outdoor scene, packed with detailed cottages, grass and trees. Rounded bumps and complex 3D terrain made small hills and depressions in the ground, a result of the new 'heightmap' terrain system. Feargus explained that the previous games used a 'tile-based' landscape, which is much like the environment in many RTS games. In a tile-based system, the ground is broken into platforms, which must be linked by ramps. Sound familiar? *Neverwinter Nights II* discards this system entirely. Instead, every portion of ground can be almost any dimensions and fully detailed and complex, with any tilt or angle imaginable. The camera angle was panned to look directly along the

ground, to the horizon.

A little disconcertingly, the environment faded into fog at around one hundred metres, so I asked Feargus if that was the maximum draw distance. With a flick of the controls, he extended the 'far plane' much further out, with the fogging effect. It looked to draw around three hundred metres or so into the distance. Feargus explained that it had been greatly extended from the original game, but the view didn't extend to infinity. Instead, there was great detail in the surrounding area. He made his character walk through a babbling brook, creating splashes, circular waves and showing the character's feet actually refracted underwater. This was just a taste of the advanced effects Obsidian are packing into the game. As the demo continued, it only got better. Feargus gave us a fascinating demo of the flexibility of the new lighting system. He adjusted the colours of the lights in a typical outdoor scene around a village hamlet with trees, grass and cottages. He made the ground reflect an unearthly blue glow, changed the sky to an evil red colour and made the fog coloured as well. Just as quickly, he switched the sky to black and created a moonlight ambience. Feargus mentioned that the game has a day and night cycle which actually casts light in different directions based on the time, changing the angle of shadows and creating sunsets.

GREYSKULL?

Next, Feargus loaded an interior castle scene. He explained that all the indoor environments now have a ceiling included, which allows all new camera angles that were avoided by the designers previously. In this vision of the castle, normal mapping on the walls showed off impressive detail in the granite slabs that pass for bricks in a castle wall. A flaming

torch cast flickering light over the surroundings, causing the shadows to dance. The light reflected off the clammy stone walls with specular highlights. The lighting model in *Neverwinter Nights II* is totally dynamic, without "pre-baked" or pre-rendered lighting elements as found in older games. As a result, levels made by community amateurs can more easily be made to the same

will be based on alignment. These characters may then give you special items, or lend assistance that you didn't anticipate. So your alignment may have a subtle impact on the game, but it still sounds as though it will be worth playing through twice to experience the different alignment options.

Finally, Feargus demoed the spellcasting system, which has been given a massive overhaul. When each spell is cast, brilliant visible effects stream forth in coloured lightning and magical energy. Above the caster, an iconic image representing the spell crackles into view, then slowly fades, burning out like a firework. This lets everyone around the magic user see what spell was cast and exactly when, taking cues from some modern MMORPG games. And there's a hefty selection: *Neverwinter Nights II* features around 350 spells. When targeting, an area of effect radius is shown, so that you can precisely hit a group of enemies and avoid damage to your own party. When it launches, don't be surprised if *Neverwinter Nights II* is one of the best-looking RPGs on the market. With the crew at work on it, we'd also be very surprised if it isn't one ass-kicking adventure, old-school RPG style.

THE STRONGHOLD BECOMES A CORE PART OF THE STORY, LEADING TO SPECIAL MINI- QUESTS AND DIFFERENT CHARACTERS...

standard of presentation as what the Obsidian designers created in the original game.

This view was inside the player's Stronghold, your very own castle, a reward that is given to the player late in the game. The Stronghold itself becomes a core part of the story, leading to special mini-quests and different characters that can be chosen to inhabit your castle, and access to those characters



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PG

Mild fantasy
violence, Gambling
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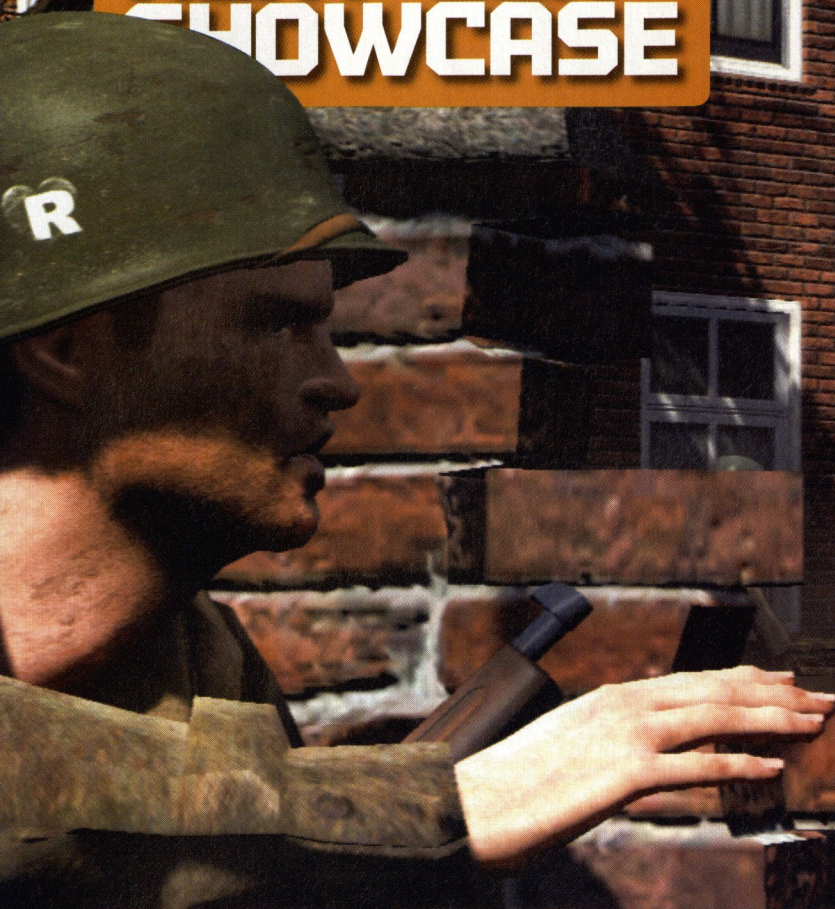


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NEXT-GEN SHOWCASE



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

When I think of the highway to hell I think of the much maligned but very funny minor classic genre film starring Chad Lowe, lesser known brother of Rob and forgotten spouse of Hillary Swank, as a humble boyfriend venturing into the nether realm to rescue girlfriend, the first Buffy, Kirsty Swanson from the grip of Hellcop and Patrick Bergen's Beezle, a poorly disguised devil. That film has absolutely nothing to do with the newest Brothers in Arms game. Instead, in the words of Randy Pitchford & Col John Antal US Army Ret. two members of the Gearbox team, "The Brothers in Arms games follow the story of a squad of paratroopers in WWII. The

locations they visit in the games are the real places and battles these men fought in. For the 101st Airborne, Operation Market/Garden was the next assignment after the D-Day invasion and it happened to be the largest airborne operation in the history of the world. It's a dramatic story with a lot of deep tension. The Allied plan was to end the war before Christmas 1944. They dropped paratroopers to seize a series of bridges and towns along a highway that led directly into the heart of Nazi Germany with the idea that they could race their tanks directly into Berlin to end the war. The Germans, meanwhile, had their best armor and infantry divisions in the area to stop them. The Germans were developing the

V2 rocket and the atomic bomb. They had to buy time. They used their forces to relentlessly attack the Market/Garden operational area at its base, where the 101st Airborne desperately dug in to prevent the entire Allied force from being cut off, surrounded and killed. This is quite a story. But, the story of the men who were there — men like Sgt. Matt Baker and Sgt. Joe Hartsock — that is where the real story is. That's the story Brothers in Arms will tell."

THE HELL'S SATANS?

Following in the tradition of the franchise, Hell's Highway will present players with gritty, fast paced unit based combat but this time around the developers



SYSTEM: **PC/XBOX 360** ■ CATEGORY: **FPS** ■ PLAYERS: **1-MULTI** ■ DEVELOPER: **GEARBOX** ■ DUE: **TBA**



It's good to see that midgets have a role to play in War.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A slightly more epic feel to the environments. We love the strategy but want to feel part of a war!

will be utilising the power of next generation graphics and processing, offering us some great new features. New, specialist troops will be available to command, including mortar, bazooka and heavy machine gun teams so you have an inkling of what's in store. Aside from dishing out the serious damage, the new, heavier weapons will be able to ablate some kinds of cover making combat a more tactical task — hunkering down behind a low wall may no longer be a viable tactic in all fights when the enemy can simply blast them away. Of course, you have the same options to oust them.

Rather than follow the traditional mission by mission design of most WWII shooters, Hell's Highway instead opts for a different approach. Using a seamless level

loading system, missions and objectives will transition from one to the next giving the game a far stronger narrative flow and less episodic nature. This change is due, in part to the development utilising the Unreal 3 engine, as well as the transition to next-generation platforms. Aside from the startling good looks, the new engine allows the soldiers to have realistic character expressions and emotions, seamlessly load content and has a number of powerful tools, such as the aforementioned terrain destruction to update the Brothers in Arms gameplay.

Usually we kind of cringe and slink away at the thought of another WWII game but Hell's Highway is looking very promising indeed, even at this early stage in development. <<



"That pile of rubble's looking a little shifty - shoot it some more"



GOD OF WAR 2



▶▶ God of War eh? Now that was one blistering rampage through Greek mythology. In fact, the game's creative director Dave Jaffe went so far as to describe it as the "greatest hits of Greek Mythology". It was also a game that pushed the PS2 further than anyone thought possible, showing off some absolutely monstrous enemies and glorious architecture. So now that God of War 2 has been announced for PS2, what's left to achieve? Well, a fair bit. If you remember at the culmination of the first game, Kratos, the crankiest man in Greece successfully destroyed the God of War and himself ascended to the throne. The second game takes place immediately after the first, with Kratos, the new God of War, a cruel and tyrannical being who strikes down anyone who dares threaten his beloved Sparta, deciding to

commit the ultimate act of hubris and try to change his fate, a quest that will take him to the very ends of the Earth. Along the way he will face a host of new enemies, all of them bent on his destruction but it looks as though Kratos will be up to the cranky task. Along with all of the moves seen in the original game, God of War 2 promises to add a host of new moves and new magic, this time revolving around the natural elements. The level of complexity and brutality of combat also looks to be upped with the footage we've seen showing a bloody battle with a Cyclops ending with the inevitable eye-stabbing. Kratos twisting one of the heads off Cerberus and various other kills that only a character like Kratos could pull off and still remain both compelling and the hero. The puzzles of the first game are also set to make an appearance in the

sequel, perhaps with slightly more weighting from what we've seen. Hopefully the puzzles will veer more towards the 3D tetris/tangram wall rather than finding keys.

Somewhat controversially, God of War 2 is being developed exclusively for the PS2 and staying resolutely current generation. The reasons for this, the developers state, is that they aren't ready to make the leap to a next generation platform yet. Although this news may come as a bit of a disappointment to some, we are happy with the news. God of War was (and is) one of the best looking games for the PS2 and the sequel promises to look even better. What finer curtain call for a great console could there be? <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
God of War 3, God of War 4, God of War 5, etc.

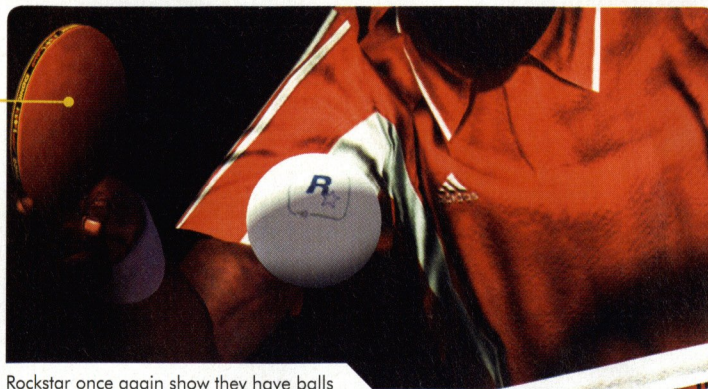
TABLE TENNIS

When people think Rockstar they think of controversy, politicians, the occasional high horse and scandal. What they don't think about is Table Tennis, unless you are unfortunate enough to have the hypothesised brain tumour or degeneration of the visual cortex which could cause one thing to be mistaken for another (as was written about in Dr Oliver Sacks' book, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat"). Obscure medical references aside, Table Tennis may not be the game you expect from Rockstar but it does carry the level of quality we have come to expect from the developers. In short, it's shaping up to be a rocking good game.

This is one on one table tennis, pure and simple. It's kind of like a tennis game but only in parts. Shot type and direction are controlled by the face buttons and thumbstick respectively, but unlike tennis games there is a hell of a lot more weight placed on spin and lightning fast

reflexes. How long the stick is pushed in a direction influences spin, as does which type of shot you choose to make. Play long and hard, returning aggressive shots with well timed and well placed shots and you will raise your intensity meter, allowing you to move faster and hit balls harder. Yeah, it's kind of like a tennis game — in the way skeet shooting is kind of like lawn bowls. It's fast, furious and a hell of a lot of fun.

One thing about the game that will inevitably piss off some punters is the fact that Table Tennis only offers 11 playable characters and four game modes. You have no option to create your own character or play through a career mode to raise your stats and skills. Instead you choose one of the pre-generated characters and play a Tournament, a single Exhibition Match, Training or take the action Online. Not being able to work through a career is a little disappointing but the paring back of the features has allowed Rockstar



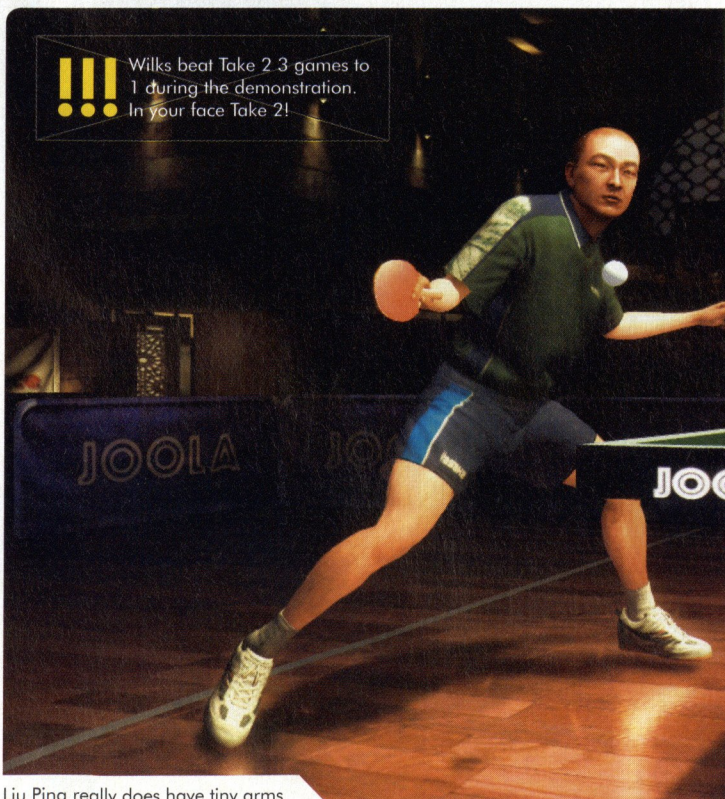
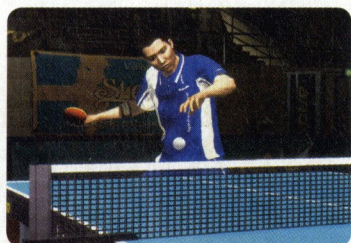
Rockstar once again show they have balls

San Diego to concentrate almost solely on the gameplay and we will take gameplay over bells and whistles any time. From our time with the game we can safely say that whilst the single player game is fun, multiplayer is where the title really shines.

The 11 character we do have are by no means disappointing either. Each character has four stats: Accuracy, Spin, Serve and Power, each of which, obviously, determines how good they are at that aspect of the game. Liu Ping, for example is a master of spin but Jesper, a hulking brute is powerful enough that he

looks like he could smash a ping pong ball through his opponent. Graphically the characters are no slouches either. Each character model features around 30,000 polygons and feature some wonderful animations, emotive faces that show their strain and feelings during the match and even real cloth physics.

It's all good but we're saving the best for last — Take 2 have announced that Table Tennis will launch at the \$69.95 price point, positioning it as one of the must have party games when it is released. We should have a full review for you next issue. <<



Liu Ping really does have tiny arms

MICRO MACHINES V4

>> We love Mashed. It took the Micro Machines concept and ran with it, giving us a realistic setting and weapons, but the same compelling four player gameplay. It's probably no surprise then, that the developers behind Mashed – Supersonic – were also the developers of Micro Machines 2, and now they're coming back to the classic franchise with Micro Machines v4.

TINY CARS WITH TINY GUNS

Don't expect a revolution though. This is very much tried and true Micro Machines racing... with a few twists. For one, there are now weapons. In keeping with the series' styling they're a little toy-like in appearance, but function in much the same way that weapons do in Mashed. You'll get plasma guns, rockets, tiny-car-seeking missiles, an electricity lock-on, rear launching grenades and so forth. Accompanying this inclusion are

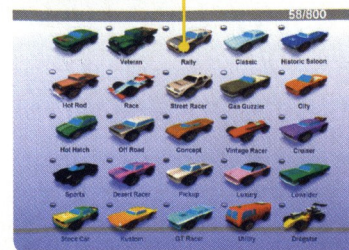
a number of powerups – health boosts, health equalisers, double damage, that kind of thing. We're not completely sold on the weapons just yet, as they can feel a little random, but the more you play the more you learn where the killer pickups are and can use them strategically. It also means races are less likely to devolve into long winded contests where two people take the perfect line around and around courses. With weapons at least the person trailing has a few options up their sleeve. And of course, the people who've been knocked out can also target the remaining vehicles from the ether. Weapons and after-death targeting can, of course, be turned off.

Along with weapons and powerups comes a health meter for each vehicle. Or should we say meters. You won't be knocked out until you've lost your green, then orange, then red health bar, but damage actually affects your

performance. By the time your health is in the red you'll likely have lost a wheel or two and will be struggling to steer, let alone keep up. Again, it's a little random at times, but for the most part that's part of the game's charm.

Many of the racing environments will be familiar to long term fans and there's an absolute bucketload of them. Settings include Pool Table, Museum, Kitchen, Roof Top, Street, Chicken Coop, Loft, Sewer, Woodwork, Bathroom, Fast Food, Garage, Science, Salon, Office, Garden, Bedroom, Boat, Shopping Mall, Library, Beach, Garden Centre, Butcher's Shop, Supermarket and Swimming Pool, each with two or three courses. There's even a track editor function! There are also 750 vehicles to unlock – although the actual number is far less as each class has a whole host of variations to collect.

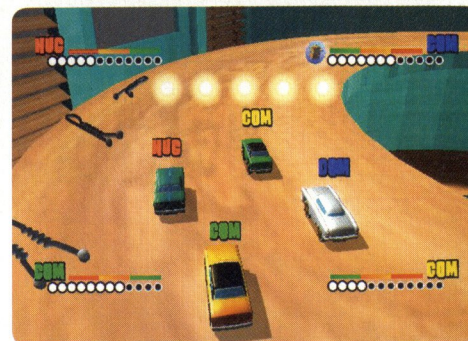
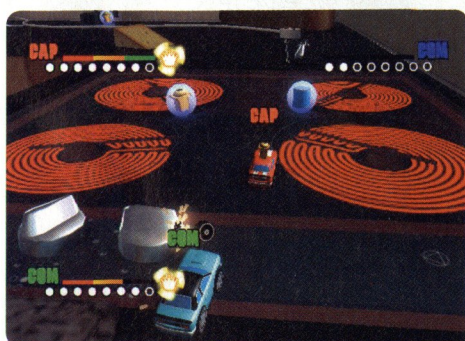
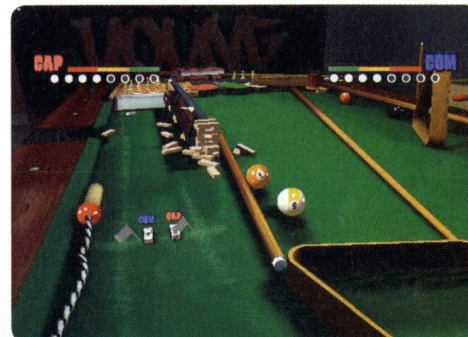
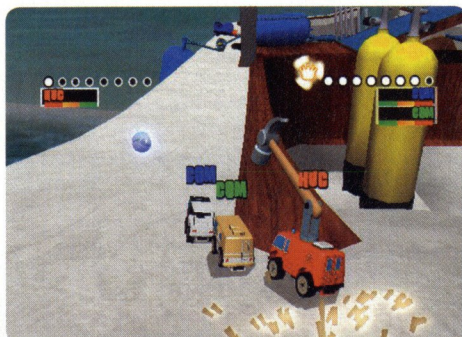
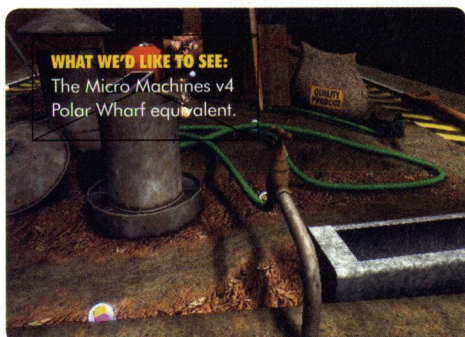
Those of you who played v3 will have some idea what to expect graphics-wise, although the plain



[up] The world's smallest showroom

shading has made way for textured worlds which, although relatively simplistic, still look good and serve the gameplay well. Thankfully the lame-ass characters from v3 have been dropped which was a very wise move.

Micro Machines v4 is also coming to the DS and PSP which should be interesting. Will everyone still be on the same screen? Or will it be a little more like a normal racing game? We don't know, but Codemasters had better give us four copies so we can find out! <<<



FINAL FANTASY VII: DIRGE OF CERBERUS

There's a strange habit that seems to be getting more prevalent amongst Japanese developers — English main menus that lead to a dense scroll of Kanji making navigating an interesting prospect. The code we have played of Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of Cerberus follows this trend. After going through the main menu with its standard array of Single Player, Online and Options, we were lost, resorting to trial and error to find out how to use items, change controls and the like. With this

in mind, Dirge of Cerberus is still turning out to be a far different game than we expected.

When Dirge was first announced and footage/cutscenes were shown the game appeared to be a Devil May Cry clone, prompting us (and others) to dub the game "Vincent May Cry" as what we saw was a fast paced third person action game with Vincent, the emo vampire from Final Fantasy VII, running around shooting and slashing his way through a horde of enemies. Our first impressions couldn't be further

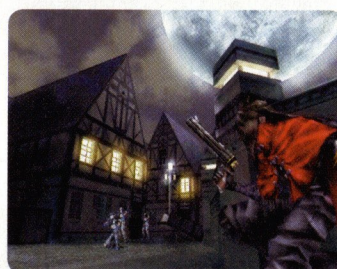
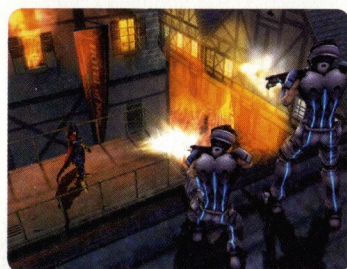
from the truth. In reality, Dirge of Cerberus is shaping up as a game more akin to Resident Evil 4 than it is to Devil May Cry. Being in Japanese (where's Bryce when we need him?), we're not too sure about the plot but here's what we know so far: the opening, beautifully rendered cutscene shows a big explosion, some news footage of the disaster, Vincent trying to shoot an old scientist, another big explosion and the vampire being rescued by Yuffie piloting a sky-cycle. The game takes place three years later with Vincent,



[up] Stand back, you're not emo enough

trying to get his life together being drawn into a bigger plot when the town he is staying in is attacked without warning (in another gorgeous cutscene) by Deep Soldiers (presumably part of SOLDIER from FFVII) and the townfolk are rounded up for some nefarious purpose.

While Vincent's high flying, jumping and shooting action in the cutscenes may serve to reinforce the opinion that this will be a balls to the wall action game, the actual gameplay turns out to be a lot slower, with Vincent, in what we've played, running through the streets freeing townfolk and shooting any Deep Soldier stupid enough to get in his way. The action is presented in



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

No more Final Fantasy VII spinoffs.



I'm here for the Malice Mizer impersonator auditions



[up] Shoot then brood

a third person, behind the shoulder view when his gun is readied and a more conventional screen centred third person when the gun is holstered. Players can also switch to a first person mode for easier aiming, although this does make some of the navigation a little more difficult. Throughout his adventures, Vincent can upgrade and modify his gun with a number of interchangeable barrels and chambers – the three barrels, long, medium and short influence the range of the weapon, the accuracy and the rate of fire, and the chambers can turn the gun into a shotgun, grenade launcher and the like. We haven't been able to experiment with this feature as



[up] "Bet you didn't miss me!"

yet but it sounds like an intriguing concept. Vincent also has the ability to turn into a giant beast for a short period of time. During the transformation he is only capable of melee attacks but does considerable amounts of damage. While the action doesn't feel nearly as fast paced as originally hinted, it feels like a solid basis for a game. Now all we need is a narrative a gaijin can understand.

As of this stage Dirge of Cerberus has no official distributor in Australia but we would be very surprised if the game wasn't picked up given the popularity of the Final Fantasy series. We'll let you know more details as soon as they come to light. <<



And then the world blew up

VIVA PIÑATA

While the Xbox has largely been seen as a more "hardcore" console, Microsoft are desperate to appeal to the lucrative mainstream market in the next generation. Xbox Live Arcade is a good example of trying to get all the members of the family interested in using the Xbox 360 (however crap the cast majority of games currently available may be), while Viva Piñata represents an attempt to build a "mass-appeal entertainment property" across multiple mediums. What does that mean? In addition to the Xbox 360 game, there's also going to be a 3D animated TV series thanks to Microsoft partnering with 4Kids Entertainment. And don't forget the merchandising down the line.

RARE-BRAINED?

While this could be seen as nothing more than a constructed attempt to create a craze a la Pokemon, Viva Piñata is not without its charm.

Much of this comes from the fact that it's the brainchild of Rare, and a game that they've been thinking about since 2002. The basic concept was a world where you built and maintained an ecosystem, attracting animals to it and trading them with friends.

From the first prototypes the game moved onto Xbox, then 360, and the animals became piñatas — to give the game its own aesthetic stamp — along the way. While this is a game that's designed primarily for a young audience, the interesting open ended approach and lush visuals should help it find a wider audience, in much the same way that Pokemon or Animal Crossing seem cute and kiddie but actually have serious gameplay value.

All your efforts in the game will be geared around creating an environment that the piñata animals want to live in. From a first person perspective (think of it like a God game) you'll sow seeds and grow

grass — starting off slow, before expanding and adding more variety and structures to your world. The first piñata that you'll attract will be a worm, which will in turn attract birds and so on through the food chain until you have a complex ecosystem. It will be your job to ensure that the piñatas are happy, to quell any friction and to keep an eye out for "sours" — malicious piñatas that like to cause trouble.

There are over 60 piñatas to attract, with the overall objective being to have every type of piñata living across your ever expanding land. In a nice touch areas and piñatas outside your haven will be in monochrome. When a piñata decides to live in your world — or you expand your territory, it will turn to colour. And what colour! If you thought Kameo was bright enough to burn your retinas to their core, then Viva Piñata somehow ups the ante.

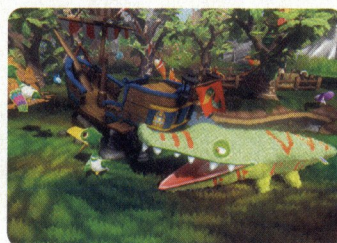
Piñatas can also have offspring

— mating is represented by two piñatas dancing, then a stork delivers the child. No, we're not kidding. Unfortunately at this stage it seems as if piñatas can only breed with the same species. It would have been cool to get some genetics in there, as trading would be much more interesting with interesting hybrids.

The Live functionality nonetheless sounds cool. Each piñata will be tagged with information about where it came from, so at least there'll be some unique elements to encourage trading. Plus, there will be both free and 'premium' downloadable content, so this is a world that could keep expanding. It's a little too early to tell whether it will actually be fun, but colour us intrigued. <<<



Viewing this page can make you slightly gay



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Fingers crossed Rare aren't wasting their time and talents on a game that no one cares about. See: Grabbed By The Ghoulies.

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RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR

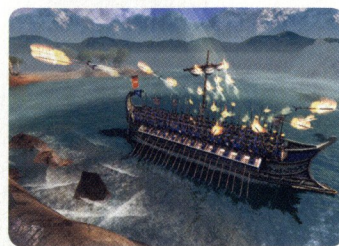
>> You may have heard that Stainless Steel Studios, the guys behind the original Empire Earth, closed down late last year. They were at the alpha stage of developing the anticipated strategy title Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War, but it seems that even developer death can't stop this game. Publisher Midway have given the title to Midway San Diego and the game is now on track for an early August release. Will it have the polish and balance required for this style of game? We won't know for sure until we get the review code, but it's certainly still looking promising.

WHEN MEN WORE TOGAS

The game is set in the ancient world, with the Persian, Greek, Egyptian and Roman empires all accounted for. One of the most interesting things about Rise & Fall is the hero command. What this means is that the game is generally viewed and

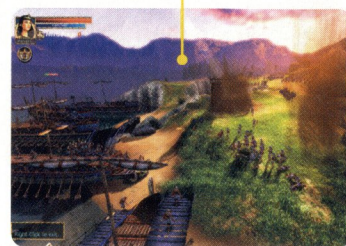
controlled from a traditional RTS perspective, but you're also able to jump into a third person viewpoint of your hero character and actively take part in battles yourself. This is dependent on having stamina, so there will be limits on how much time you spend in third person, but the ability to move back and forth between the strategic viewpoint and the tumult of battle makes for a nice change from always being the overseer. There are eight hero units in the game — Julius Caesar, Germanicus Caesar, Cleopatra, Ramses the Great, Sargon, Nebuchadnezzar, Achilles and Alexander the Great, each of which has their own weapons and special abilities. You'll be able to level up your hero units and gain new powers as you progress too.

Of course it's not all about the hero units, Rise & Fall also sports 80 unique units, from archers and cavalry through to battering rams and siege towers. Naval combat is also a major focus for the game,



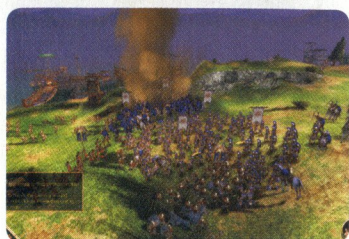
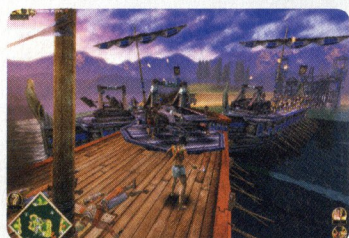
giving you control of accurately modeled biremes and triremes and allowing you to ram and board enemy vehicles. And of course, you have full control over the units you place on the ships — do you want infantry, archers or catapults?

Like most RTS titles, Rise & Fall should really come into its own in multiplayer. Midway San Diego haven't said much about the modes that will be available yet, but we do know about one team mode where one player manages the battle from the standard tactical viewpoint and the other plays the entire round as the hero unit. Very cool. The game



will support multiplayer for up to eight players.

Rise & Fall is no slouch in the graphics department either. The engine effortlessly throws hundreds of units around on screen at once, not to mention battleships and siege machines, with some nice touches such as dense swaying vegetation and realistic water. Of course, the test is how the game looks when you're playing as your hero unit, and while there's room for improvement, it's pretty convincing. Hopefully by the time the game hits retail the AI and animation quirks will be sorted out. Full review soon. <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
The Hero Mode as more than just Dynasty Warriors lite. Give us a challenge and some strategy!

Ancient Weapons 101: The Khopesh

BATTLEFIELD 2142

EA and Dice are taking the Battlefield franchise somewhere a little different for the next game in the series. Cue: the future, 2142. A new ice age has arrived, rendering most of the land on the planet unliveable. Two super powers have risen and are fighting tooth and nail for the habitable land left. They are the European Union and the Pan Asian Coalition, and both are armed to the teeth with futuristic weaponry and equipment. We're talking hi-tech assault rifles, cloaking devices, drones, EMP grenades to disable vehicles, highly maneuverable aircraft and even mechs. Yes, mechs. Of course, players will still



have the basic kit choice, this time pared back to four loadouts — the sniper kit, support kit, assault kit and anti-vehicle kit. From what we've seen so far, many of the environments are very urban in nature — definitely the native habitat of the mech, and a great staging area for massive 64 person futuristic battles.

It's definitely a change of pace, and a refreshing one at that, allowing Dice to really get creative with their warfare, while still aiming to deliver a game that's intuitive to play, and allows for a myriad of strategies to evolve as players learn the ins and outs of the game. More soon.



In the future, camouflage is still boring



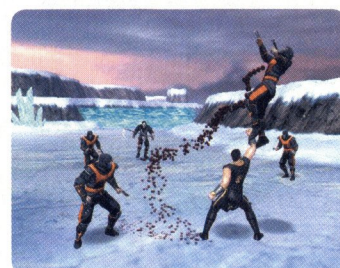
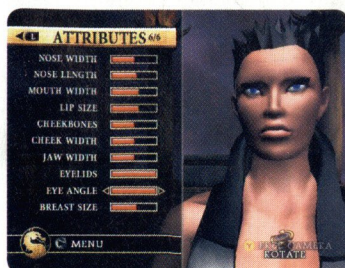
SYSTEM: PC CATEGORY: ONLINE SHOOTER PLAYERS: 1-64 DEVELOPER: DICE DUE: LATE 2006



MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON



Never take fashion advice from either of these two



As the series gets older the Mortal Kombat franchise seems to be getting better. Not only did the games grow in complexity with the move to 3D in Deadly Alliance, it also evolved to a new level of co-op fun with Shaolin Monks. And now the game looks like it's going to be evolving in scale as well. Mortal Kombat: Armageddon, which is being touted as the last in the series (although the game will undoubtedly come back in some form on a next-generation system), is set to be a MK fanboy's dream. Like Stansfield in The Professional, Mortal Kombat: Armageddon is the type that looks around wildly and screams "get me everyone. EVERYONE!". That's right, Armageddon will feature every character who has appeared in a MK game. What's more, Armageddon will offer players a Kreate-a-character (sorry, karacter) mode allowing them to make their own fighters, complete with custom fatalities! Naturally these fatalities probably won't be half as gory/funny as the scripted fatalities but it's a damn cool addition

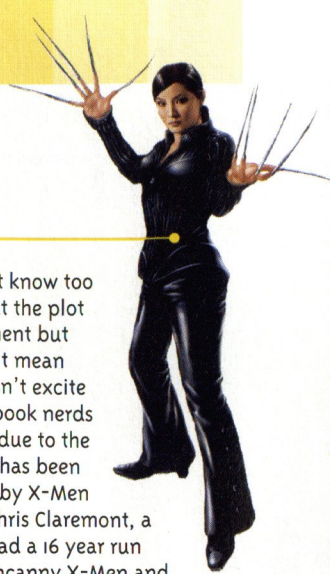
nonetheless.

The combat system will remain quite similar to the previous two 3D titles, Deadly Alliance and Deception, but we have heard that there will be an active block/parry ability added to the fighting engine allowing the player to block and counter with precise timing. It has also been suggested that Armageddon will put slightly more emphasis on aerial combat so new attacks, air-throws and counters have been added.

The other significant change to the franchise in this last instalment is a rather serious overhaul of the fatality system. Instead of simply standing at the correct range and hitting the right buttons, fatalities will now feature fatality combos, so if a player pulls off enough move sequences in the time limit they might not only tear out their opponent's heart but also their brain, spleen and lungs. At any rate, and as strange as this makes us feel, we can't wait to see more of MK: Armageddon. It looks like a fitting end to the series in its current form.

SYSTEM: PS2/XBOX CATEGORY: FIGHTING PLAYERS: 1-2 DEVELOPER: MIDWAY DUE: OCTOBER

X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL MOVIE GAME



OK, the name may be more than a little clunky but we have been assured that it's only a tentative title. A clunkier, though more appropriate title for the game could be something along the lines of, X-Men 3: The Prequel, X-Men: The bit in the middle or X-Men 2.5. Instead of simply acting out the events of the film as so many adaptations are wont to do, Z-Axis have instead opted to travel the far more interesting route of showing the events leading up to the film. The result of this is twofold; players are given backstory and not simply a whole heap of spoilers and characters not necessarily in the film can be utilised without seeming to be shoehorned in. As many of you will be aware, the character of Nightcrawler will not be reappearing in the third X-Men film. X-Men: The Official Movie Game will explain his absence.

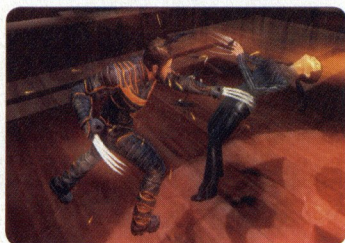
In a move that's guaranteed to please and disappoint X-Men fans in equal measure, only three characters are available to play; Nightcrawler,

Iceman and everyone's favourite feral Canuck, Wolverine. Each level is tailored exclusively to one character utilising their strengths and powers; Nightcrawler's levels require rapid movement, light puzzle solving and quick hand-to-hand combat, Wolverine is all about getting up close and personal to let his claws do the talking and Iceman, strangely, has been cast as the flying hero, mostly sliding around on an ice bridge utilising ranged attacks. Whilst Iceman feels a little odd to us, both Wolverine and especially Nightcrawler feel fantastic. Z-Axis have wisely decided to give players near permanent access to their powers so with the blue German you can "bamf" about to your heart's content and Wolverine constantly regenerates health.

As it currently stands, Nightcrawler is the highlight of the game, with each of his levels that we've seen offering numerous places to teleport to/climb up/jump from and

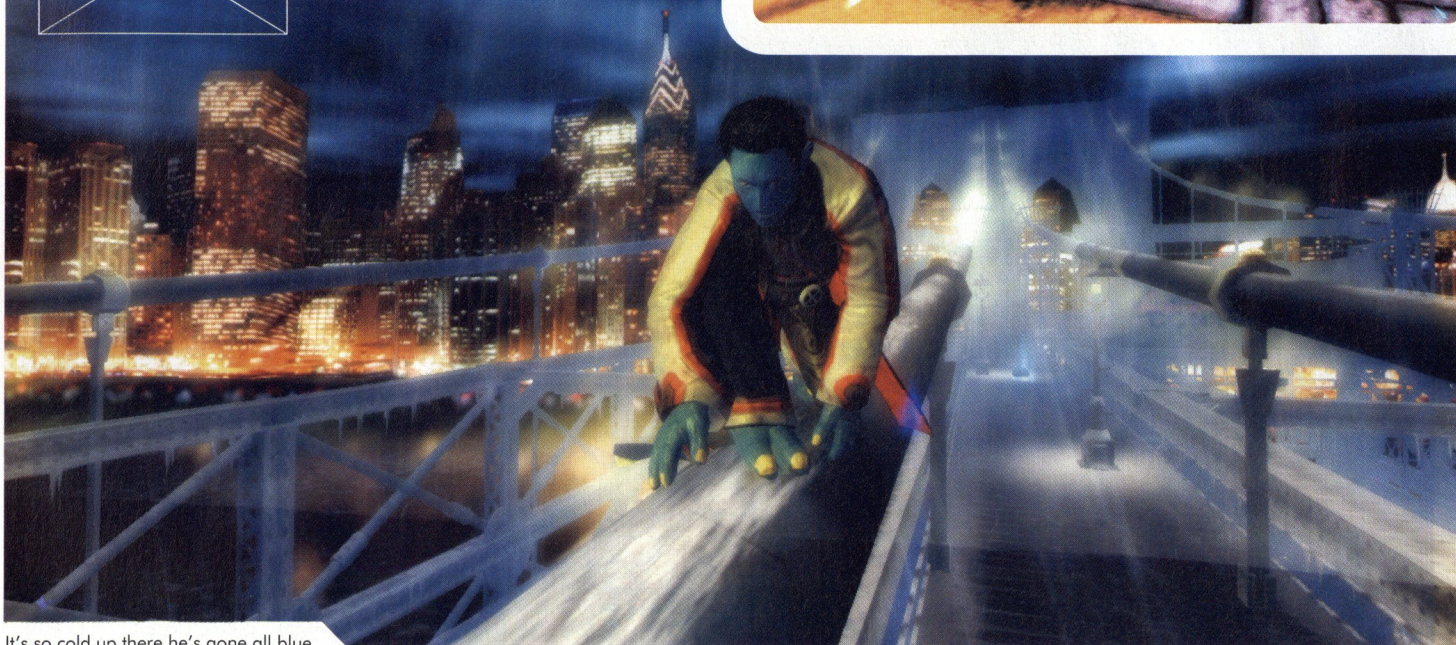
allowing him to seamlessly integrate teleporting into melee combat. After a few seconds of familiarisation with the controls you'll literally find yourself bouncing off walls. Wolverine also handles well with a number of hand-to-hand attacks and combos. In keeping with the character, Wolverine constantly regenerates health but this skill can be boosted if he is not taking damage. Wolverine can also work himself up into a berserker rage by doing damage to opponents. In his rage mode, Wolvie does a good deal more damage and regenerates health at a very fast pace, even healing wounds that normal regeneration will not. Iceman on the other hand from what we've seen spends most of his time flying around engaging enemies at long range with ice blasts. We may not particularly have liked how the character handled but one of the levels, a boss battle against a giant flaming reptile coiled around a nuclear silo looked spectacular.

We don't know too much about the plot at the moment but that doesn't mean that it doesn't excite the comic book nerds in all of us due to the fact that it has been co-written by X-Men luminary Chris Claremont, a man who had a 16 year run penning Uncanny X-Men and the co-scribe of the second and third X-Men movie, Zack Penn. If there are two people who should be able to write a compelling and faithful script it's them. So far we've seen the game running on both Xbox and Xbox 360 hardware. The current generation code looks good but as seems to be becoming synonymous with Activision 360 titles, the next generation graphics only seem to be an incremental improvement. There are still a couple of months to go until release so we should hopefully see some more polish by then. <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

An Xbox 360 version of the game that is a marked graphical upgrade.






It's so cold up there he's gone all blue

SYSTEM: GCN/PC/PS2/XBOX/XBOX 360 ■ CATEGORY: ACTION ■ PLAYERS: 1-2 ■ DEVELOPER: Z-AXIS (PS2, XBOX AND XBOX 360) ■ DUE: MAY

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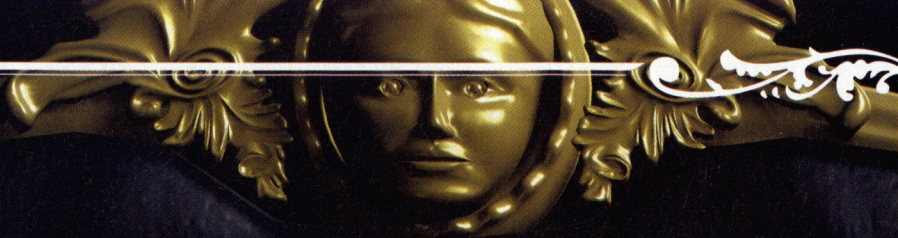


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feature



عبدالرحمن

SAY GOODNIGHT

TO THE BAD GUY

In which Daniel Wilks travels to Spain to live the high life

SYSTEM: PC, PS2, XBOX ■ CATEGORY: OPEN WORLD ■ PLAYERS: 1 ■ DEVELOPER: RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT ■ DUE: 2006

When Tony Montana spoke those words little did we know he was speaking the truth. Since the 1983 release of *Scarface*, Hollywood cinema hasn't truly seen another character like him, a violent, homicidal, amoral, greedy, murderous bastard. He's a villain pure and simple. His only semi-humane quality is that he refuses to kill women and children but rather than making him a hero it just makes him slightly less of a monster, allowing people to write about him in lower case rather than having to resort to capitals all the time. He's powerful, intimidating, frighteningly charismatic and a force of nature; now he's also the main character of a game. This isn't just any old movie adaptation though, no playing through the plot of the film for you. *Scarface: The World is Yours* takes place immediately after the film ends. Anyone who has seen the movie will know this is a controversial choice as there doesn't really seem to be too far Tony can go after the end of the movie; after all, he does get shot in the back at close range by The Ghost, the silent hitman in the employ of Sosa. Never fear — *Scarface* is not some strange Zombie treatment of the film, seeing a now dead but still coked up Tony Montana launching the most successful illicit brains operation

in the Florida Keys (although that would be pretty cool); the film is a "what if?" approach to the material. What if Tony Montana killed The Ghost instead of the other way around? Well, what happens is that Tony Montana kills a lot of people and has to build his cocaine empire up again.

MY BALLS AND MY WORD

The opening gun battle in the Montana Mansion really highlights what is to come in the game. It's bloody and brutal but also a lot of fun. Armed with his "little friend" and coked off his dial, Tony blasts his way through an army of Sosa's men. The combat system used a nice mixture of lock-on and manual aiming. The lock on isn't a snap-to style of aiming, rather simply a lock on to the nearest enemy in front of you. It's apparently quite possible to play through the entire game in this fashion but that loses some of the point and all of the impact. While locked on the player can control the crosshairs to target individual body parts to do more damage or even blow them off. Amusingly the developers have even allowed players to target the left and right testicle independently. Aside from the chuckles, the independent targeting adds to one of Tony's most important abilities, Balls.



As Tony says in the film he has two things, his balls and his word and he's not going to break them for anyone. In the game, Balls is representative of the Montana habit of flying into a blind rage. After causing enough carnage (enough to fill the Balls meter anyway), Tony can fly into a blind rage at which point the game switches to a first person perspective. In this mode Tony is all but unstoppable and capable of



AFTER THE GUNFIGHT IN THE MANSION EVERYTHING GOES BACK TO STEP ONE; TONY ALONE, POOR AND POWERLESS



dishing out big time damage. During this time the player also regenerates health. Although it has not been confirmed it was hinted that this will be the only way in which Tony will be able to regain health rather than looking for the normal health packs to appear. If this is truly the case then the game will have a much more balls to the wall approach to combat (excuse the pun) than most other free roaming action games as combat will be a way to regain health rather than lose it.

Aside from shooting people, Tony has one other way of raising his Balls meter — taunts. It's pretty safe to say that in the film, Tony Montana has quite a way with words. His ability to verbally abuse opponents is second only to R. Lee Ermye (Gunny Hartman from Full Metal Jacket) and this is translated well into gameplay. In between shots, players can taunt targets, intimidating them and essentially

racking up kill combos, making the balls meter grow faster than simply fighting. Other elements of the combat system include up close and personal finishing moves, what promises to be a robust melee system (not demonstrated during the event as it still has not been finalised) and the standards such as cover and being able to sprint for short periods of time.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE OTHER GUY'S GREED

Naturally combat isn't the only thing there is to Scarface: The World Is Yours. After the gunfight in the mansion everything goes back to step one; Tony alone, poor and powerless, doing what he has to do to survive. The bulk of the gameplay revolves around raising Tony to his former status. In other words the game is about being the best gosh darn drug dealer you can be. Never fear moral crusaders, Scarface isn't going to teach your kids how to become mid 80s drug czars unless in the real world buying and selling drugs revolves around finding a shifty looking guy in any one of the hundreds of alleys dotted around the city and playing a button timing haggling mini-game where if you don't time your button pressing right they might shoot you in the face.

Building a drug empire revolves around both story and side missions to take over the various boroughs around Miami. To conquer the boroughs Tony must buy and sell drugs, buy shopfronts to sell drugs out of, launder money in banks and eventually unlock and conquer the drug warehouse of the area, an epic battle akin to the original mansion shootout. As Tony's sphere of influence increases not only will he have access to more areas and money for missions and freeform fun, the game world will react differently to him; if you carjack someone early in the game people will run screaming or deliver some pretty harsh verbal tirades — do it when you have power in the borough and they may apologise for not recognising you and actually give you their car. After

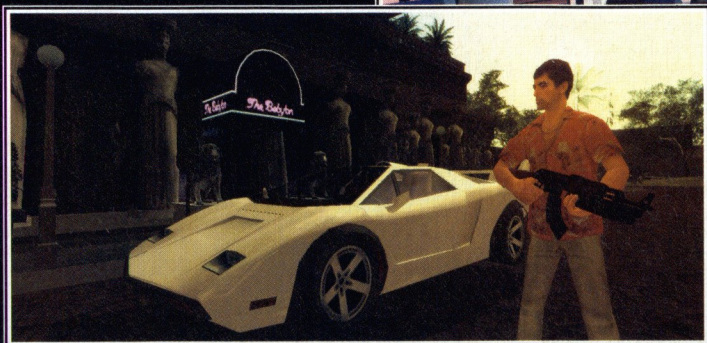
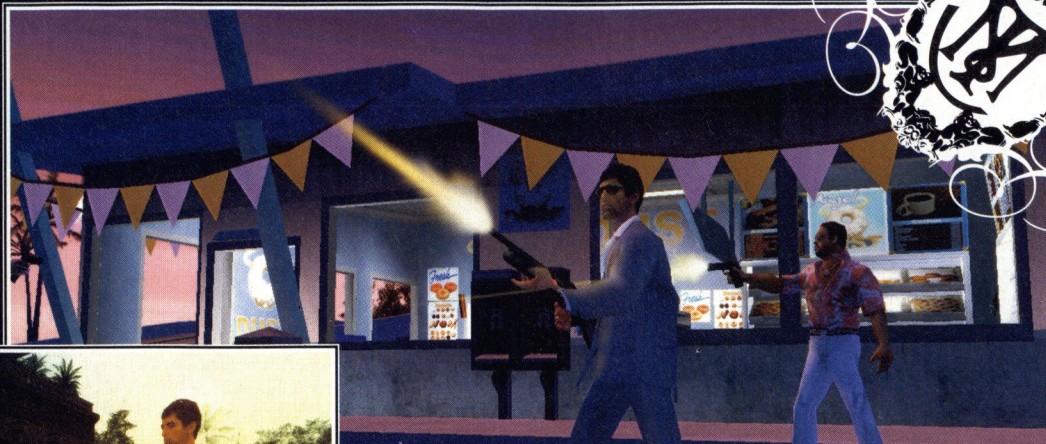
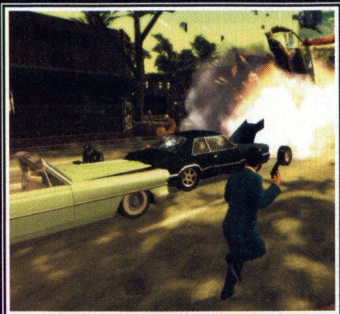
conquering Miami, Tony can extend his influence to the Bahamas and eventually even take the fight to Bolivia and Sosa himself.

Now for the inevitable GTA comparison — on the surface, Scarface is very much one of the GTA inspired games that have appeared on shelves in recent years. It has all the hallmarks of the breed; a large living city devoid of load times, the ability to interact with any NPC, story missions as well as side missions, a killer soundtrack and even the ability to steal vehicles. Underneath all this, however, Scarface has a hell of a lot of its own merits. The game takes the seamless world one step further by having no load times between indoor and outdoor environments. The city is more alive than those in the GTA series as each of the inhabitants has a conversation tree eight lines deep, many of them being quite funny. As I said before, even the carjacking has a significant point of difference.

DON'T GET HIGH ON YOUR OWN SUPPLY

Now for a game about dealing drugs, one of the most contentious points would be actual drug use in game; after all, Tony Montana spends the second half of the film in a near constant cocaine stupor. Not so in the game. After the shootout in the mansion, Tony remembers rule number 1 — don't get high on your own supply, so spends the game straight. Although drugs may be the central conceit of the game the taking of them is not. Tony's credo of never harming innocents, women or children also plays a role in the game. At no point in the game will Tony be able to physically harm women, children or NPCs (who don't deserve it in the case of NPCs). Although some people will bitch and moan that Radical and Vivendi are pandering to the zealots that call games murder simulators and the like it fits with the world and the tone of the film — after all, Tony's downfall in the movie comes when he refuses to harm a woman and her child. With all that's happening in Australia at the moment as far

SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND - Yes, in fact, I am talking about my penis. Not in a sexual way mind you. More in a, "why does this always happen to me" kind of way. You see, I have an uncanny ability to step out of hotel showers just in time for housekeeping (who have presumably knocked on the door a few times to see if I was in) to walk in to straighten the bed, restock the mini-bar and otherwise do the housekeeping stuff I am otherwise unaware of. In Spain it happened again. I step out of the bathroom, thankfully wrapped in a bathrobe to almost run into a slightly overweight middle aged Spanish woman. She didn't speak English and my Spanish runs about as far as enquiring about the location of a mentally disturbed chicken (donde esta el pollo loco?) so there was a moment's silence, a little fidgeting and me checking the folds of my robe to make sure Lil' Bad Cop wasn't poking his head out to see what the fuss was. She said something, I mumbled something. She left. The next morning I remember to hang up the Do Not Disturb sign. Non Molestem.



as games go hopefully the fact that Tony never uses drugs and drug use is never glamourised in the game will sit it in good stead for release.

Even if you can't take drugs and beat up innocent people there is still a lot to do in the game with your ill-gotten gains. There are numerous collectable items that can be purchased ranging from cars to buildings, weapons, hirelings (who we have no real information on but can perform tasks like bringing a car to your current location or assassinating enemies) and outfitting your mansion to reflect your decadent lifestyle. You can even use your money to invest in businesses or film production. Some investments will simply help the player make even more money

but others will actually influence gameplay, giving the player access to more combat abilities or even allowing them to "cheat" in the game. I put cheat in inverted commas because at the current time we have no idea what "cheat" exactly means in this context.

At this stage of development Scarface is looking very solid. The engine is very attractive on current generation hardware and the gameplay looks as though it should appeal to both GTA fans and fans of faster paced action games. Now all we have to do is wait a few months and hope that everything goes right for a local release. <<

WOULD YOU KISS ME IF I WORE A HAT? What is a PR gig without booze and girls in bikinis? To be honest I don't know and I'm not all that eager to find out. Being a game about the world being yours and all, the event of course featured copious drinking (from which I abstained due to jetlag but had much fun watching the Brits and Germans get rat-arsed and have a go at each other) and 25 comely lasses in bikinis. Although ogling some Spanish lovelies (and a few English imports) was fun for the most part you couldn't help but feel a little sorry for them. After chatting to one of the girls, who heard my accent and talked at me incessantly about an "absolutely brilliant" (repeat ad-nauseum) trip she had taken to the Gold Coast a few years back, I discovered that part of their contract stated that they could not cover up in any way; if they did they wouldn't get paid. It was OK for us - there were a number of lovelies in skimpy outfits including a couple with slightly less on than the girls in body paint at the Playboy Mansion - but the temperature averaged around 15 during the day and 10 or so at night. Not exactly bathing suit weather.



SCARFACE: THE INTERVIEW IS YOURS

Disclaimer: The following interview contains quite a bit of profanity. If you have a sensitive disposition then you should probably look at some screenshots of the new Pokemon game or something. You have been warned. For those that want to complain without actually having read the interview, the word "f**k" or derivations thereof appears 28 times.

DW: Can you give me a brief rundown of what you do at Vivendi?

Pete Wanat: Currently I am an Executive Producer and this is Dan Bedilla who is an executive producer on Scarface. We both work out of LA for Vivendi Universal games. What we do is we interact directly with Universal, with sales, with marketing, with PR as well, every different aspect of what a publisher does. What we are not is the developers, coders, artists, or part of the creative aspect which is done up in Vancouver by the Radical team up there. What we do is we help them, we add focus, we work with Universal directly so we know what the IP holder wants and expects from its game. We interact with them on a weekly basis making sure we capture the feeling of what the IP is and we work with every single group in that from marketing to sales to PR, QA; so we're sort of caretakers of the game. We find the IP first and then we sit down with the developer, in this case when we first started working with Radical, Radical was an independent developer so we helped pick them as a developer and then later on when we started working with Radical on more and more games and eventually we (Vivendi) went on to purchase Radical turning it into an internal studio within Vivendi. So what we do is really add focus and drive, make sure everybody is on the same page for the type of game we're making and help keep the torch of the quality at a certain level and really make sure the game is the best it can be.

With the IP, exactly how and why was it chosen? Was there a watershed moment when you thought this was the right time for it to happen?

PW: I think there were lots of different reasons to do Scarface. Scarface is now more relevant than it ever has been. It is so much more popular today than it was when it was released at the cinemas.

It bombed at the box-office.

PW: Yeah. I think it was an incredible film but now it even sort of transcended "cult favourite". In the US it's the largest grossing library DVD of all time. So it is so much more popular and if you look at the current state of movies and stuff like that, what are we going to do? Make a game based off a new Star Wars movie? F**k man, the Star Wars movies all f**king suck. Lucas went from, like, my childhood genius to being a f**king retard with a camera. I don't care how many f**king digital effects you add to a movie...

And how many toys you can market.

PW: ...what Scarface had, it rings more true now than even when it was released. Of course we wanted to do a game like Scarface because... going back and taking a classic and making it into a game is so much more appealing than trying to force feed a toy brand generic movie license IP and slap that on a game.

Still with the IP, upon release it's bound to gather a lot of controversy, especially with the current state of legislation in the US, legislation in Australia and Europe looking to jump on the bandwagon. What type of thought has gone into that? The game's all about being the bad guy, about being the best drug dealer you can be.

PW: To make a game where you don't play the good guy. I'm so tired of being told no and being safe. Gamers can get that from 1000 other f**king publishers who make games like that. For Scarface it's like here's a chance to take something where you don't play the f**king hero, you know. You play the villain.

He's not even an anti-hero. There's very little good about him.

Dan Bedilla: The only thing that's good about him is he won't kill women and children but he's in a totally dirty business and he's surrounded by dirty people.

PW: You know what? The film Scarface was, you know, the idea for it was off the original Scarface film...

Which had massive problems when it was released.

DB: F**k yeah, that whole prohibition period.

PW:...I think the game follows that lineage of what the Brian De Palma version does and so we're not being controversial to be controversial, what we want to do is we want to make a game that reflects the soul and vibe of the film. You cannot do that without involving violence and drugs and profanity and women and sex and violence to unbelievable degrees and if that's what's right for Scarface, and it clearly is, then that's the type of game we're going to create. I feel bad for Australians who will get a game that has to



be toned down for the ratings board. It's time for the Australian gamers to stand up and say "this is f**king bullshit, we are an art form, we deserve to be treated the same as a movie or a book or any other type of art", and the fact that the Australian government discriminates against games and gamers is insulting to f**king everybody. My hope is that something happens between now and when we release the game in Australia so that, you know, gamers stand up. Not just for Scarface either. This is a problem we have in the games industry itself that ratings boards and people who piss all over gamers and don't feel they're worth the salt and think that gaming is not a medium that reflects art. That's bullshit. We tell stories the same way films and books do. If they can sell the movie in Australia then they certainly should be able to sell the game.

There was actually a rather large survey carried out by the IEAA (Interactive Entertainment Association of Australia) of gamers and non gamers about gaming habits, average age and the like. The average age is in the early 20s and from the non gamers who didn't know there was no R rating for games the overwhelming majority, around 80% thought there should be an R rating.

PW: The best part for gamers is that non gamers, people who didn't grow up with games, they're dying in greater numbers every day, OK? That generation that doesn't get games, thank god they're getting old and f**king dying. The problem that we have is that they don't take us seriously as an art form and we, myself as a producer who has worked in the industry for a number of years, we've seen us grow up as an industry.

DB: We were there when it started with Mortal Kombat at Acclaim Entertainment. When Mortal Kombat started it was like, "look at the blood and the violence" and all that stuff and everyone was like, it was on TV, it was on the news and everything. Everything was brought to the forefront and now they're trying to tone us down as a medium but you have movies where everyone goes to R rated movies and sells the DVDs but all of a sudden some Hot Coffee action happens and now we're being attacked for it.

PW: The whole Hot Coffee thing is the biggest piece of f**king bullshit. The code is locked away. Anybody who exported that code out should have gone to gaol. That was never meant to be seen, they locked it away. None of the Hot Coffee, all that thing where Take 2 had to recall it and update its version of the game is such f**king bullshit. They locked it out. Players should not have gone into that code. They're breaking the EULA that they have in the beginning of every f**king game. You cannot tamper with the code. If somebody tried to steal cable f**king television or steal a f**king music disc they would be prosecuted. Or if you pirated a movie. But if you go and you break into somebody's sacred f**king code and you tamper with it so you can expose something the developer had locked away that's f**king bullshit. That's total f**king bullshit.

The OFLC RC San Andreas because they considered Hot Coffee to be controversial

content in the game that they hadn't been shown at time of review.

PW: But it wasn't in the f**king game! It was locked away!

I guess the fact that it was on the disc made them consider it was in the game.

PW: Bullshit. The bottom line is that it wasn't in the game. It was locked out. There's no way for you with a normal, conventional PlayStation to be able to play the game and unlock Hot Coffee. There's no cheat code that unlocks Hot Coffee. You have to go in and use some sort of tampering device to sniff around and find something and unlock it. Those people should have gone to gaol for it. I feel really bad. San Andreas is one of the best f**king games of last year. A huge inspirational source for us making an open world game. That was bullshit. I have a major problem with it. There's not going to be any content in Scarface that's locked away and hidden. You'll see everything we have. It's all on screen.

DB: We've learned from a lot of mistakes that other games have made. We made sure we did a lot of research on open world games.

PW: You didn't feel like we pulled any punches with what we showed, right?

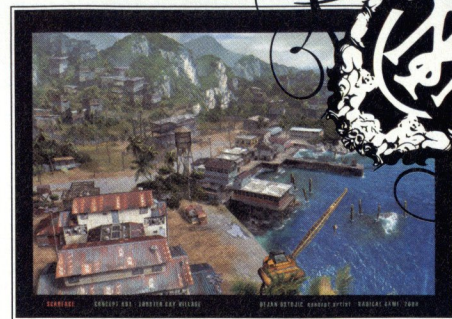
Hell no.

PW: (laughs) In addition to not pulling any punches, do you feel like Tony Montana? That's the thing. Nothing that we do, we're not trying to be controversial, we're trying to be true to the IP.

DB: We work too closely with Universal not to. They see everything. We have such a great relationship with them and we want to keep it going.

It's nice to see with a license title that it's not just a case of someone buying a license and slapping a game on it.

PW: I think if we had just wanted to license slap we would have come out last year. The fact that we have a company that committed not only to giving the game more time but doubling the size of the development team. Literally taking two development teams and putting them together, you know. I'm not talking about, you know, the f**king EA Horde where you just put 300 people on a f**king game to get it out the door. We did it and said we were going to do it for a full year. That is echoed throughout the game. Dan can probably talk about gameplay better than I can.



DB: Initially we looked at a lot of other games in the open world genre. One thing that a lot of people have problems with play wise is targeting. Combat mechanics. So, since this is a third person game, we looked at other third person games that are popular, that people love and specifically at their targeting. We looked at Mercenaries and SOCOM and stuff like that and we considered targeting for the newbie player all the way to the hardcore guy and we said let's take some of these things that will appeal to a new player and a more hardcore/advanced player and we really took a great lock on system and combined it with a little analogue movement so you don't feel like you're just locking and firing, locking and firing. You can lock, move around, fire be more advanced and then you can have a total free look system that doesn't have any snap-to or anything. It's player control all the time and there's a heavy reward for playing that way. You have a total hybrid system keyed towards both sides.

How early in development was the decision made to have Tony's verbal abuse and taunts involved in gameplay?

DB: Taunts have been in from the get-go. It's something that has been a huge staple in the game and we've plotted out even more and added in more taunts. It doesn't get tired. You just want to keep taunting the whole way through.

PW: I've said before, we don't have a taunt button. We have a f**k you button. It may not always say "f**k you" but you know if it's Tony what he's conveying is basically "f**k you".

DB: "F**k you"

PW: And that's the real difference. I've even tried to convince them (Radical) to remove the taunt button and just call it a f**k you button because that's what it's all about. Tony just really giving it to everybody.

DB: He's Tony f**king Montana baby, that about says it all. <<<

YOU CARRYING? - You'd think that a country that not only had a terrorist bombing on a train in the very recent past as well as having their very own terrorist organisation prone to the occasional act of violence, the ETA, would have some pretty stringent airport security. Such is not the case. Any of you who have travelled to a Visa Waiver country will be familiar with the forms you need to fill in to enter a country where you put down how you came in, what flight, what carrier, your place of residence in the country and you tick a little box saying that if you screw up on their turf they will bone you local style. We got one of them on the plane but this was the first indication that security may be a little lax. The form appeared to be photocopied and a little off centre at that. "Ok", thinks I, "maybe they ran out of the good ones" but apparently not. We hit the ground and clear customs in five minutes flat. The old guy manning the Passport Control booth never looks at my passport, he simply opens it to the middle and stamps it. It was lucky that the laser printer sign sticky-taped to the booth told me to walk on through and collect my bags otherwise I wouldn't have known. The trip out was exactly the same. After a few days in Malaga I realised why the authorities didn't care for airport security - if there was a bomb on a plane it would only blow up the residents of Malaga - middle aged Brit imports who are busy trying to relive their childhood, mostly at the top of their lungs.

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Reviews

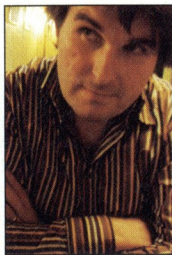
60 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

After all the hype, can Oblivion live up to expectations?

Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

Next-gen discs already dead



Could it be that Sony's biggest regret in the coming disc format war is having pushed yet another proprietary format out with the PSP? UMD has been a major kick in the pants for Sony. Recent news indicates many movie studios will disappear from the UMD space very soon, as it's believed they've all been losing money on the format. Was it only obvious to everyone on the consumption side of the equation? Which genius thought we'd like to pay DVD prices for a single-platform disc with nothing special to show for it? We can only hope UMD will stand as an historic low-point in the corporate copyright mania of the noughties...

The thing about UMD is that its failure is timed right here on the cusp of Sony's big push for high-definition supremacy. In a Reuters story on the subject, there is a quote from a 'high-ranking exec' at Universal saying, "It's awful. Sales are near zilch. It's another Sony bomb — like Blu-Ray." Ouch! Universal has an exclusive agreement with HD-DVD, so they have a vested interest in dissing Blu-Ray any chance they get. But there is no mistaking the ammunition is there. UMD makes Sony look bad to the people they need most going into the Blu-Ray launch — the movie studios. Not to mention the gullible users who actually thought it would work as a movie format.

For Sony, Blu-Ray is the heart of their next gen console because they need it to be the platform on which their control of the next generation of movie viewing is based.

Good news for Sony. Global tech research firm Forrester backed Blu-Ray for the win back in September. It has more support, better capacity, better copyright control, and PS3 will

give a superior install base. Bad news. Forrester believe this will be a pyrrhic victory. The years of delays have made general consumers nervous to buy in on something that won't have everything they want available to it. Early adopters are already looking ahead to even more advanced formats, like holographic media that will boast Terabyte storage. Add to this our investment in DVD libraries. I'm quite happy to keep watching mine, thanks very much. DVDs may not be high-def, but they still look better on an HD screen than on an SD, so we aren't entirely going to be walking in the dark ages. DVD has delivered an excellent intersection of storage, quality and price. Like the recent slow down in PC upgrades, when most consumers are happy with what they've got, they feel no need to buy again.

Back with Forrester, what it sees as the big trend (and no doubt you do too) is digital media stored on general storage formats. The future is downloads, not discs you buy in a store.

Following the theme, what has worked for the PSP is the Memory Stick Duo. It may be another proprietary format, but it has a far wider base of use and it is a tabula rasa. You compress your own library to suit your own preferences. Sony may not be happy about it, but without it the PSP would be doing it very tough.

On the future death of discs, Peter Moore at Microsoft may have said it best. "Whether it's 5, 10, 15, 20 years from now, the concept of driving to the store to buy a plastic disc with data on it and driving back and popping it in the drive will be ridiculous."

We'll get some more fanfare once Blu-Ray and HD-DVD officially arrive, but there's a good chance they could both be dead by the end of the decade. Digital evolution is only getting faster, and for those who go too slow their time may already be past.

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM - What's it all about in a literal sense?

0-49

These would be games that score zero to forty-nine percent.

50-59

Odds are these are games that score fifty to fifty-nine percent.

60-69

Gee, ya think these games might score sixty to sixty-nine?

70-79

I dare say these titles get a score from seventy to seventy-nine.

80-89

Yep, you guessed it. Scores from eighty to eighty-nine percent.

90+

Ninety percent or more in score are the hallmarks of these games.





Context is a strange thing. A great part of Chibi-Robo's charm comes from the garbled speech and musical sound effects, which, on occasion, distinctly remind us of Killer 7. Creepy.



Exactly who owns that toothbrush?

Chibi-Robo

TIM HENDERSON still hasn't cleaned his room...

Sitting there on a store shelf, displaying a running pose with a power chord carried overhead, Chibi-Robo doesn't much look like a game that will revolutionise either your life or have a massive impact on the industry. It looks like a quiet little game that may simply be content with making your day a bit brighter. Well, there's nothing particularly misleading with appearances here, because Chibi-Robo is just that. Prepare to have your pants charmed off you while still keeping them on.

NUTS & BOLTS

The core narrative premise of Chibi-Robo opens upon Jenny Sanderson's eighth birthday party. Young Jenny is convinced that she's a frog, and although this little issue of hers may be the most random one in the game, her parents also have their own troubles. Mr. Sanderson is an out of work slob, and Mrs. Sanderson

lives in a constant state of frustration and financial panic. Chibi, a miniature robot capable of jamming ludicrous amounts of stuff into his head, arrives at the party as an overpriced gift, and the little guy is just what this dysfunctional family needs. Chibi, you see, is a robot that was designed (along with his talkative manager, Telly Vision) with the primary objective of making people happy. This becomes the ultimate goal in the game; to rise through the rankings of Chibi-Robos the world over to eventually attain the coveted status of Super Chibi-Robo. To do this you will need to amass happy points, which can be done at the leisure of the player by keeping the house clean, dealing with family issues, or getting involved with a series of toys ranging from a love troubled chew toy to insecure army eggs, all of whom also have their own issues.

The pace of Chibi-Robo is almost forcefully relaxed, and trying to



[up] A very Akira moment



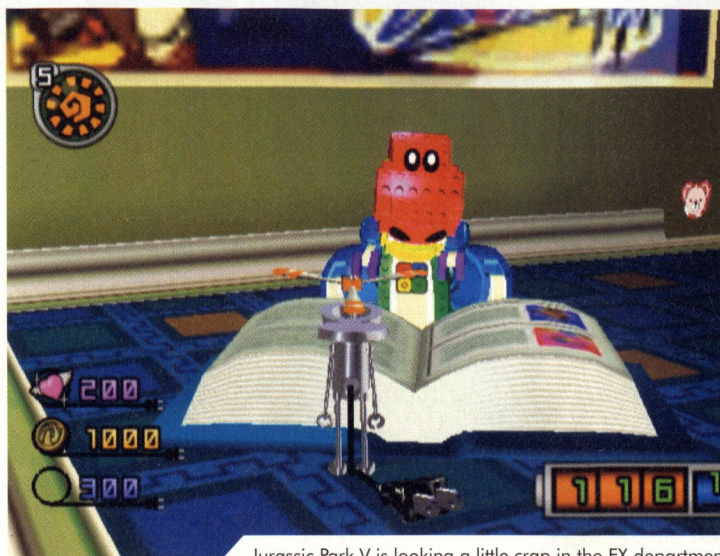
[up] Like a tiny Ultra-Man

plough through the game's central storyline may well prove to be an exercise in frustration. Although puzzles in Chibi-Robo are inherently simple, they arise as you come across them and it is much easier to just wander the house and allow yourself to gradually stumble across answers as you go, rather than specifically seeking them out. Progression in the game is handled in a way that will work wonderfully for some, but will feel restricting for others. Chibi-Robo runs off restricted battery power, and must plug himself in and recharge at power outlets whenever his power begins to run low. This plug does feel like it's dragging behind him when he runs, but it can be carried overhead, although the speed

boost isn't that great. Get enough happy points, however, and your ranking will go up, and at certain intervals this will result in a battery upgrade. Logically, as Chibi's power increases those areas that were visible, but always seemed out of reach, gradually become accessible.

CURSE YOU, SECOND LEFT FOOT!

On a technical level, Chibi-Robo is the visual equal of the GameCube games you were playing two or more years ago. It's not throwing around a huge number of polygons, all of the effects used are quite straightforward, and the clean and colourful textures, while nice, are a little lacking in detail. Thankfully, what Chibi-Robo lacks in technical merits it makes up



Jurassic Park V is looking a little crap in the FX department



What the hell is wrong with that kids face?



for with design and consistency, as well as an easily manipulated camera. Both Chibi and Telly appear genuinely cute, and the world they inhabit is well contained with a steady visual standard that assures that no aspect of the game looks out of place, and that no area looks notably better or worse than any other.

In the audio department Chibi also delivers, as being the charming little blighter that he is, Chibi-Robo has a distinctly musical beat to his step. In fact, the game is basically devoid of traditional sound effects and instead applies a variety of musical notes and chords. Be it digging in the dirt or scrubbing away at an oil stain, everything comes with a pleasantly unconventional pitch that extends as far as the characters and their garbled speech. The music is simple and well suited to the location and scenario at hand, although it does have a habit of cutting out at night for no apparent reason.

Chibi-Robo's goal of making people happy does not completely lack opposition, and he will at times have to battle with the Spydors;

THERE'S A ROUGH GEM WITH A SOLID SENSE OF HUMOUR IN HERE FOR THE MORE PATIENT GAMER

small, spider-like robots with a grudge against all the Chibi-Robos of the world. Never fear, though, as Chibi has a number of items at his disposal to help with his housework, ranging from Mr. Sanderson's stain-removing toothbrush through to the Chibi Blaster, which will quickly render these spindly fiends to scrap metal. This is rather handy actually, as Chibi needs scrap metal in order to build utility bots (ladders, bridges, and teleport pads that seem to cause as much clutter as any of the trash you may pick up around the house) in order to improve access to various areas. The teleport pads, in particular, are useful as the game is broken into selectable 5, 10, or 15 minute blocks and Chibi will return to his own little Chibi House at the end of each of these, meaning that being able to skip past a flight of stairs can at times seem vital. No doubt this time cycle will annoy some people, and there is little to redeem this, although

some convenience is made up for with the game's costumes, some of which change how characters relate to you, and a couple that do things like transporting you straight back to the Chibi-House or turning day into night.

A game like Chibi-Robo will no doubt pass over many people's heads in spite of its charm. The thought of doing housework and helping people out may just seem weird to some people who would rather buy a game where they get shot at instead. But there's a rough gem with a solid sense of humour in here for the more patient gamer with a taste for things that are a little different. It's not the sort of game that offers an immediate sense of challenge, and it does feel a little more tedious after the first ten hours, but with its offbeat humour and unique perspective on scale, Chibi-Robo will inject a new sense of adventure into the mundane for anyone willing to give it a fair go. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Adventure

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Skip

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: \$TBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Utterly charming and very relaxed.

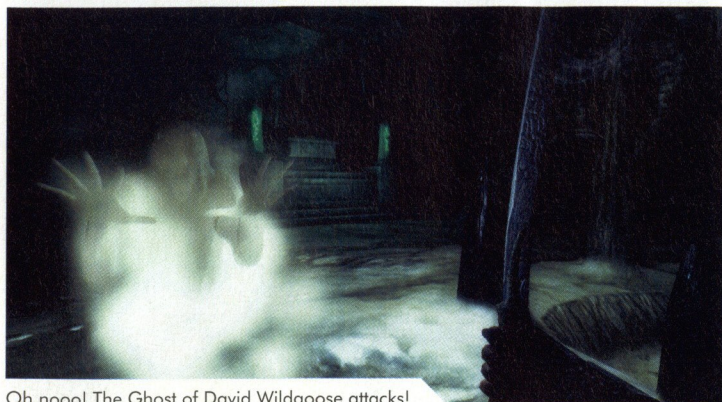
MINUS: Many people simply won't 'get' it.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	82	84

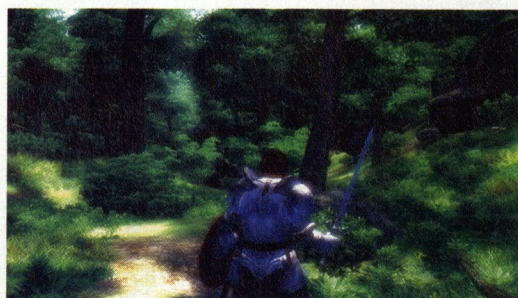
OVERALL

82

An enjoyable game, but we want the actual robot!



Oh nooo! The Ghost of David Wildgoose attacks!



Quick travel is very handy. Once you've discovered an area, you can travel there instantly via the map. But even with this time saver, you'll still be hooked for a long, long time.



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

DYLAN BURNS graduates to Oblivion Boffin...

You wake inside a prison cell, uncertain of how you came to be there. You just start to get your bearings when Emperor Uriel Septim, voiced by Patrick 'make it so' Stewart, appears, honour guard in tow. He feels you're important - he's seen you in his dreams - and when your small party is ambushed he beseeches you in his dying breath to find Martin, his illegitimate son (voiced by Sean 'Boromir' Bean), before dark forces deal a similar fate to the one and only heir to the throne. On top of all this, Gates of Oblivion, portals to another plane where evil Daedra Princes dwell, are appearing throughout the province of Cyrodiil and the onus is on you to rectify the situation. Thus begins your journey of high adventure and discovery.

PASSING THE SMELL TEST

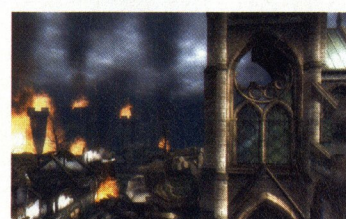
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion is, in a word, gorgeous. Patterned tiles and stonework, rugs, carved furniture, intricate weapons and

armour - every single object is incredibly detailed. And it's not just the pretty items and architecture; outside, forests and undulating hills provide moments of surreal beauty, especially when influenced by dynamic weather effects and the day/night cycle. Of course, we all know that graphics alone aren't enough if the gameplay stinks. Thankfully, Oblivion doesn't stink. In fact, if I were to carry the metaphor further, Oblivion would be the sweetest olfactory experience you could imagine.

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind was a great RPG in many respects but it suffered from a relatively empty, static world. Oblivion sticks with Morrowind's open-world approach yet manages to fill it to the brim with quests, creatures and uber loot. The much-touted Radiant AI system gives NPCs 24/7 schedules. Enter a town at night and the townsfolk are likely to be asleep; waltz through the streets during daylight hours and



[up] Like icy ruins? This game's for you!



[up] Like ruins on fire? etc.

you'll see people on various errands and catch snippets of conversation, some of which will be centered on quests. If you learn about a new topic, you can ask about it and investigate. This system is fluid and natural, although conversations - which are all fully voiced - can sound rather like gibberish. Some path finding issues aside, Radiant AI certainly succeeds in its goal of making NPCs seem more active. You'll feel that the gears of the world really are turning, even if you aren't there to witness events, especially if you stumble across unscripted fights or other strange shenanigans.

Quests are compelling, well written and, most importantly,

heaps of fun. The beauty of Oblivion is that you can really tailor how you play. Perhaps you prefer stealth over full-on brain bashing, or like to balance both magic and brawn - it's up to you. Leveling up is accomplished by actually using abilities (divided into major and minor skills) rather than an XP system, so that your character evolves to suite your playing style.

Combat is an intense and visceral experience and is a marked improvement over Morrowind's hit-and-miss affair. Spells are accessible via quick buttons and it's now possible to defend with a shield and roll off some devastating magic. Realistic physics also contribute



Obscene! Put some rags on!

in a big way; thousands of objects in the game can be picked up or manipulated and bodies will roll down slopes or fly away from your killing blows in spectacular fashion.

The game world is massive (at least three times that of Morrowind) but thankfully your compass shows areas of interest such as camps, ruins and shrines, as well as your current mission objective(s). Compass icons will constantly tease you with their existence so expect to be distracted - a lot. It's so easy to get lost for hours exploring ruins and caves and you'll experience a real dichotomy between internal and external environments. Outside it is bright, verdant and lush, conducive to happy quest getting. The dark, depressing and claustrophobic dungeons, on the other hand, speak to the tomb raider in you and call for cautious investigation lest you

THE GEARS OF THE WORLD REALLY ARE TURNING, EVEN IF YOU AREN'T THERE TO WITNESS EVENTS

become impaled by the nasty traps or nefarious denizens therein.

HORSEPLAY

Disappointingly, the inclusion of horses feels almost tacked on. Control of your mount is not fluid and despite providing a faster means of travel they're a pain to dismount when ambushed. Also it's somewhat unrealistic that merchants will not buy stolen goods (they don't even show up in your sell list), forcing you to join the Thieves Guild if you wish to pursue a life of filching. And how the hell would a guard know that I stole a horse when I did it miles away, or days ago?

Graphical pop up can be quite

noticeable and distant textures tend to look a little ugly in comparison, but it's a small price to pay for the sheer beauty that envelops you. The leveling system of the game is also interesting: enemies and loot will spawn in relation to your level so that you're constantly fighting against creatures with sting. Admittedly it can be frustrating to receive an arse-whooping in a dungeon that you found easy the first time through, but the flipside is that you're always in the thick of things and it becomes worth your while to revisit explored areas on the off chance of scoring some esoteric items.

Even with these few issues, Oblivion shines through the critical mist pretty much unscathed. After all, no game is perfect, right? So was the long wait finally worth it? Was it ever! Oblivion is a fantastic game that will be enjoyed for years to come and is a massive title in every sense. <<

>> MINI ME - There are two mini-games on offer: lockpicking and persuasion. Lockpicking involves pushing tumblers upwards and clicking them into place. It can be frustrating at first, but there's an auto attempt option for the uncoordinated. For persuasion, you need to complete four social interactions - admire, boast, joke and coerce - to improve a person's disposition. Each person will like one, love one, dislike one and hate one. The trick is to judge the effect of each action to net the greatest social gain.

AVAILABLE ON:

XBOX 360 / PC

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks

PUBLISHER: Take-Two

PRICE: \$89.95 (PC), \$99.95 (360)

RATING: M

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Realistic geography and flora, detailed visuals, unlimited gameplay.

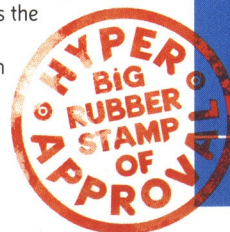
MINUS: Horseplay, psychic guards and merchants, graphical pop up.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
95	92	95

OVERALL

95

Role playing heaven on a stick.

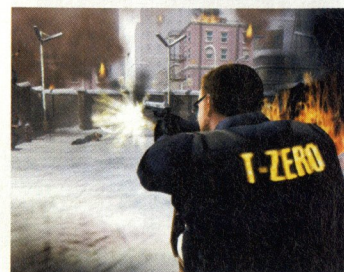
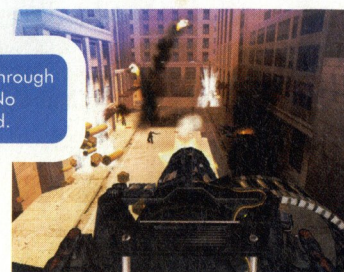




You can't actually chop a fire out



!!! Plot advancements are revealed through cheesy Channel 7 news reports. No sign of Darryl Summers thank god.



One of the harsher drinking games around

Urban Chaos: RIOT RESPONSE

CAM SHEA racks up the headshots

Riot Response is the game that Black should have been. It takes an approach that balances fun and skill, arcade and realism, with gameplay that's at once tried and true, but at the same time sporting enough new twists to hook you in. Most importantly, it's a game with plenty of stats and challenges that will have you playing through levels multiple times. In short, it's not going to change the world, but it's a whole heap of fun along the way.

NICK MASON REPORTING FOR DUTY SIR

You are Nick Mason, a member of the controversial new T-Zero law enforcement unit. You're the last line of defence in a city on the brink of destruction, as well as being the first to be blamed if something goes wrong. It's a politically charged set-up, but fortunately the gameplay is all about putting holes in no good punks and rescuing civilians.

As we mentioned in the preview you're equipped with an awesomely indestructible riot shield, which opens up your defensive options nicely — you no longer need to

move from cover to cover, can use it as a melee weapon and can even throw grenades from behind it. From the outset you'll also have a Taser — always handy for bringing in enemies alive... or burning them to a crisp if so inclined, and very early on you'll pick up a Thermal Breather which allows you to see in dark or smoky environments. It's a good set of options and the gameplay is nicely balanced between out and out action and slightly slower paced sections where you're working alongside medics and firemen to rescue people.

Each mission has a number of regularly updated Objectives to be completed, but it's the Special Objectives that you'll be paying most attention to. These involve getting a certain number of headshots or non-lethal arrests, finding gang masks and doing the entire level without dying. Each of these will net you medals, and the more medals you collect, the more you can level up. Say hello to increased clip sizes, a better riot shield, more powerful weapons, body armour and so

on. It's a great system as it's very clear when you'll get your next upgrade so you'll always be going back to earlier missions to just get that last medal so you can go into the newest mission with better abilities. While collecting gang masks may not sound that exciting, getting 30 headshots most definitely is and requires a different style of play through the level.

The final Special Objective in each mission is to take in the gang leader alive. Do this and you'll unlock optional timed missions. Finish these quickly enough and you'll be awarded a modified and very cool weapon (announced in a hilariously over the top voice) for use in the rest of the game. These missions are really the gravy on top as they require plenty of practice before you'll be able to efficiently and mercilessly power your way through within the time limit. All up there are 204 medals to earn in the game and 55 rewards. Gee, sounds a lot like what Black promised to be doesn't it? Do yourself a favour and get this instead. It's nowhere near as pretty, but it's a better game. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Rocksteady Studios
PUBLISHER: Eidos
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: May 26

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Headshot challenges, timed missions, good fun.

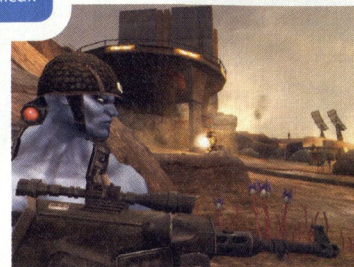
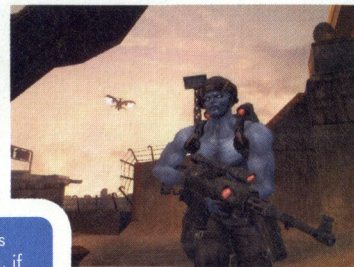
MINUS: Not the prettiest game in the world, clichéd bad guys.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	84	86

OVERALL
86
A bit of a diamond in the rough this one...



!!! Trooper drop pods are very, very cool, if somewhat impractical.



Body armour is for the weak



Future Pintos still explode for no reason

Rogue Trooper

DANIEL WILKS' personality has been implanted in a keyboard

Based around the cult 2000AD comic of the same name, *Rogue Trooper* is one of the most fun, unpretentious shooters to come around in a while. Players take the role of Rogue, a blue, genetically engineered soldier battling (along with other blue genetically engineered soldiers) against numerically superior enemies on Nu-Earth. That's about the size of it. There is a plot about a toxin that can kill the troopers, even though they are meant to be immune to all conventional toxins, some evil villainy and the like but the action is what carries the game. With no frills attached, the action does the job ably enough.

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

Played in third person, *Rogue Trooper* is a rather pared back experience. There isn't really anything in the game you haven't seen before but the execution is solid enough that you shouldn't care. The action, for the most part is run and gun, occasionally taking shelter behind cover to lob a grenade, take a few potshots

or blindly fire over your head to make the enemies duck. The range of enemies isn't huge but the AI is competent and the levels well designed with a number of set-pieces and choke points.

The only real point of difference between *Rogue Trooper* and numerous other 3rd person shooters is powerups/weapons. Instead of looting gear off downed enemies, Rogue, after a few missions, has harvested the personality chips from a number of his comrades and placed them in his gun, backpack and helmet. Once chipped, Rogue's standard gear becomes far more useful. Not only do they talk and give the occasional bit of useful advice, they gain abilities that will be used throughout the game. The chipped gun adds a slight auto-aim feature. This does not make the game simply a matter of holding the trigger down and waiting for the gun to snap to the next target but rather a little tweak in accuracy that lets you be a bit sloppier with aiming; something that comes in handy when facing multiple enemies. It can also be

placed as a sentry gun. A chipped backpack, by far the most useful of the upgraded abilities, allows Rogue to salvage gear and scrap from downed enemies to be stored and later synthesised into ammo, health packs, new weapons, weapon upgrades and the like. Finally, the upgraded helmet allows the player to hack into computers and control panels.

In keeping with the rest of the game, the graphics and sound are both decent, functional and fairly unspectacular. The character models are good as are the animations and the majority of cutscenes are well rendered. Sometimes the hardest thing in the world to do is describe something that is good but unspectacular as there are only so many words that describe that "above average but uninspired" feeling. *Rogue Trooper* is one such game. It's good, not great, fun but not memorable, decent but workmanlike, clever but uninspired. Is it worth your money? Sure. Is it worth going out of your way to get? Well, unless you're a fan of the comic, not really. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Shooter

PLAYERS: 1-4

DEVELOPER: Rebellion

PUBLISHER: Eidos

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fun, clever upgrades, reliable.

MINUS: Workmanlike, samey, uninspired.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	80	78

OVERALL

76

Well worth a look for fans of the comic.



He's not wrong about the monstrous ships



Gal Civ II is available for direct download online for \$61, as well as in retail for only \$69.95.



If only it could transform into a robot

Galactic Civilizations II: THE DREAD LORDS

Gather round and **DANIEL STAINES** will tell you a story

The Terran Alliance can go to hell. Duplicitous scumbags. You know that they did? Let me tell you what they did.

A TALE OF TREACHERY

There I was with five A-grade planets in the bag. I had a booming economy, a strong research sector and a steadily growing fleet of capital-class attack ships. Everybody in the galaxy was my friend — especially the Terrans. With their sound ethical values and emphasis on trade, the Terrans seemed like the only race I could trust. That's why I listened when they suggested we destroy the Yor.

Don't get me wrong: the Yor Collective and I were never very close. They were aggressive and militaristic and our shared borders were becoming a source of constant tension. The Terrans argued that they were a growing threat that had to be confronted before it was too late. I agreed. With our combined forces, the war would be quick and decisive. We'd be home by Christmas and have a few new planets for presents.

It didn't work out that way. The Terrans didn't declare war. What they did was watch while the Yor and I decimated each other in a long and very expensive war of attrition. When I asked the Terran leader to help, he smugly informed me that he couldn't spare a single ship. What a load of bollocks. Can't spare a ship? I could see that he had destroyers and troop transports positioned all along my borders. What could he possibly — oh. Crap. CRAPPING CRAP IT.

I never stood a chance. Weakened beyond recovery by my fight with the Yor, my colonies fell quickly to the Terran onslaught. I had been thoroughly duped: goaded into war and then completely obliterated by an empire I believed to be my ally. And that's when I realised — Galactic Civilizations II may just be the best 4X-style strategy game I've ever played.

I'm not saying that it's better than Civ IV. What I'm saying is that I like it more. It offers a different kind of experience: shallower and less polished, but also more

accessible and exciting. It's the kind of game where — thanks to some wonderfully flexible mechanics and insidiously clever AI — stories like the above are commonplace. That's why I told you that little tale: it encapsulates everything I love about this game.

Well, almost everything. One aspect of Gal Civ II that doesn't come across in that story of Terran treachery is the huge extent to which it encourages player expression. Almost everything you could want to change is changeable: your race, your flag, your stats, your leader's portrait — THE DESIGN OF YOUR SHIPS. Oh, man, designing your own ships and seeing them fly into battle is just rad. My ships are all abominations of course, but still — they're MY abominations.

So, in conclusion: Gal Civ II is totally great. It's cheap, it's engrossing and it doesn't have any copy protection. If you own a PC, there isn't a single good reason not to buy it. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Stardock

PUBLISHER: Auran Games

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Incredibly deep and engrossing.

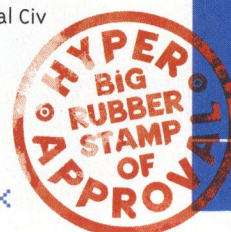
MINUS: Say goodbye to all your time - free or otherwise.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	70	94

OVERALL

92

Exemplary strategy gaming... in SPACE!



GHOST IN THE SHELL 2 *INNOCENCE*



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION - 2004

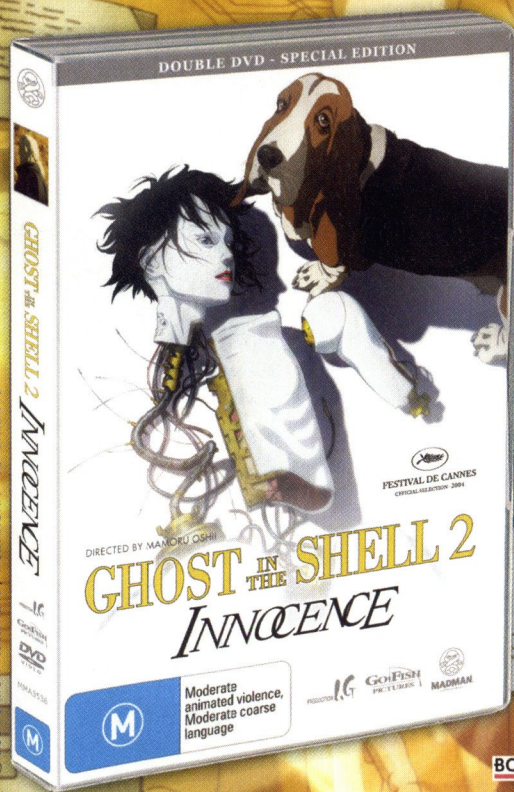
IN 2032, THE LINE BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE HAS BEEN ERASED...

The highly anticipated **DOUBLE DVD** sequel
to the anime classic **GHOST IN THE SHELL**

"Combining stunning artistry and an impeccable soundtrack, Innocence questions what human life actually is - arguing that it's more than just flesh and bones. It's a film you'll want to see more than once. ★★★★★" *THE MOVIE SHOW, SBS TV*

OUTSTANDING EXTRAS INCLUDE

- English language track
- Audio Commentary
- Making of Innocence featurette
- Australian exclusive interview with director, Mamoru Oshii
- Australian exclusive interview with Production I.G. president, Mitsuhsa Ishikawa
- UK interview with director, Mamoru Oshii

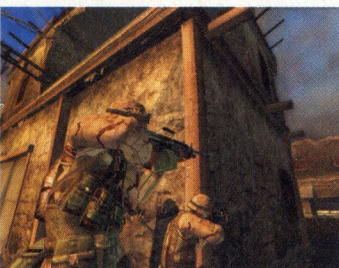


**GITS: STAND ALONE
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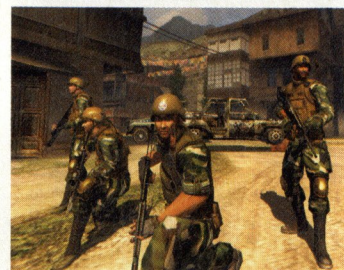
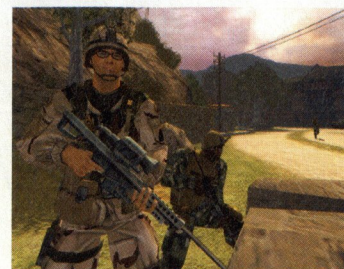




The tank manual is smaller than expected



He's got some freakishly long fingers



Full Spectrum Warrior: TEN HAMMERS

MARCH STEPNIK recommends a good hardware store...

You know the background, right? Pandemic and THQ were commissioned by the US Army to create a military training simulator, with Full Spectrum Warrior ending up as the public and commercial offshoot of their labour. And that end result was pretty damn satisfying; a squad-based tactical action game where you didn't actually directly shoot at your adversary. FSW offered a more cerebral approach to hostile skirmishes where the adoption of correct military procedure (read: the worship of ample cover) was rewarded with virtual survival. There were problems to be sure, but the overall effort was a remarkably refreshing take on the more traditional, first-person military shooter which succeeded in putting you on the frontline of a seemingly authentic US Army-based operation.

Ten Hammers doesn't rewrite the FSW rulebook. The basics are all here and intact (in particular the game-defining, essential and effortless use of cover to protect your squad), although there have been some welcome additions and tweaks. You can now directly aim and fire at opponents (although

you'll find yourself falling back to the generally more effective order-based system — manual-aiming leaves you in many cases vulnerable to enemy fire), you can control vehicles (like a nice big tank which packs a shredder of a machine gun and a gutsy cannon), it's now easier to switch between and issue orders to multiple teams, and you can now climb staircases and engage in fire-fights from a higher vantage point.

Multiplayer fans are the other big winners with this sequel. The co-op mode is back in more polished form, but this time around you can also actually take part in battles against another player. These adversarial missions have been well thought out too — coalition forces may have access to superior fire power and support, but the insurgents have strength in numbers and are more nimble footed. It's rewarding, particularly if your opponent has mastered the rather complex controls of FSW.

A BIT FLAT?

For all the well-conceived additions in Ten Hammers, the same main issues that held-back the first game

surface in the sequel. This is a hardcore strategy game which isn't exactly pickup and play, and for better or for worse, the levels are highly repetitive. There just isn't a lot of variety in play in FSW.

One of Ten Hammers' most obvious gameplay problems is a good example of the inflexibility the game displays to events outside of its strict, tactical canon. Newly implemented direct-fire capabilities or not, the game was designed to be played-out with middle-distance skirmishes rather than anything else. So when you stumble across an enemy in close quarters, it's a real scramble to issue controls to take out your enemy and usually results in a fatal wound to your squad. With some powerful weaponry at the ready, this fumbling just kills the well-conceived atmosphere of the game.

Still, FSW is a rewarding experience for military-enthusiasts who don't mind trading in a relatively steep learning curve and a general lack of direct control for some realistic and challenging fire fights. Ten Hammers is a good sequel — just not a brilliant one. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy Action

PLAYERS: 1-Multi

DEVELOPER: Pandemic

PUBLISHER: THQ

PRICE: \$79.95

RATING: MA 15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Engaging tactics, high immersion factor

MINUS: Cheesy story, difficulty.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
76	80	76

OVERALL

77

A safe sequel, but worth a look nonetheless.



The Crocodile Hunter gets militant



This game lacks the Hyper seal of approval

SOCOM 3: US NAVY SEALS

ED DAWSON plays a less than advanced warfighter

As our story opens, a nasty North African dictator is shooting an American diplomat in the head. Whoops! There's going to be some kind of response to that. It's the Navy SEALs, and a continuation of the traditional run-and-gun action that the SOCOM series is known for.

SHIFTING GEARS

Driveable vehicles make a big entrance into the series, with your Taliban-type foes driving Toyota sets with mounted heavy machine guns. Your team on the other hand has access to Humvees, desert buggies and SOCS patrol boats, which are just decked out to the max with multiple miniguns and a grenade launcher. Vehicles can be used in online multiplayer games too.

In one of the early missions, your team is hammering through the desert in two Humvees. Assisting a local resistance force, you destroy a military convoy that rumbles down the road. This is a great scene, with intense shooting action. Sadly, the mood is ruined by awful bugs as you realise there is no way to make your squad get back into the two

vehicles and follow you on to the next objective. You're reduced to one vehicle from that point on. It's a tragi-comic state of affairs and deeply regrettable as other elements of the game are really quite polished.

SOCOM 3 essentially plays like many military shooter games from the late 90s. You'll rarely be allowed to take an alternative route to an enemy position. As soon as you stray only a short distance off the beaten track, sometimes as little as thirty metres or so, the game warns you that you're leaving the mission area. Even though you can still fight from that position and you're still in danger. You're basically forced to take the simplistic front-way in on most missions.

Further restrictions became evident in our encounter with a tank. Reading the mission briefing, we knew there was going to be enemy armour. So we equipped our team with AT-4 rocket launchers. Peeking out from cover, as the tank rained bullets and shells in our direction, we hit it a number of times with anti-tank rockets. It seemed totally invulnerable. Apparently the only way to kill it is to use the laser

designator to call in an airstrike, even though we're loaded to the gullets with anti-tank rockets. This old-fashioned state of affairs is sadly typical of many aspects of the game. In 2006, we seriously expect better.

AI is a mixed bag. On the one hand enemy AI is very good: when you fire at them and it's a near miss, they will immediately go to ground or run to cover. They will then run between cover points to advance on you or crawl forward, trying to remain out of sight.

On the other hand, your friendlies' AI is woeful by comparison. You'll wish the enemies were on your team, as your buddies repeatedly fail to hit someone standing three feet away. Over and over, you'll turn around to find an enemy standing inside your squad, pouring bullets into the team, while nobody tries to stop him. When you place explosives, they sometimes don't move away in time. Which results in them attacking you. They also lag behind when you're moving on foot, such that you'll often have to defeat frontal enemies on your own. It can be very tempting to obliterate them all with a HE grenade. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS

PLAYERS: 1-32

DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive

PUBLISHER: Sony

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: MA 15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Vehicles added to single and multiplayer game.

MINUS: Tragic AI, old-fashioned game design, mediocre effects.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
60	50	65

OVERALL

70

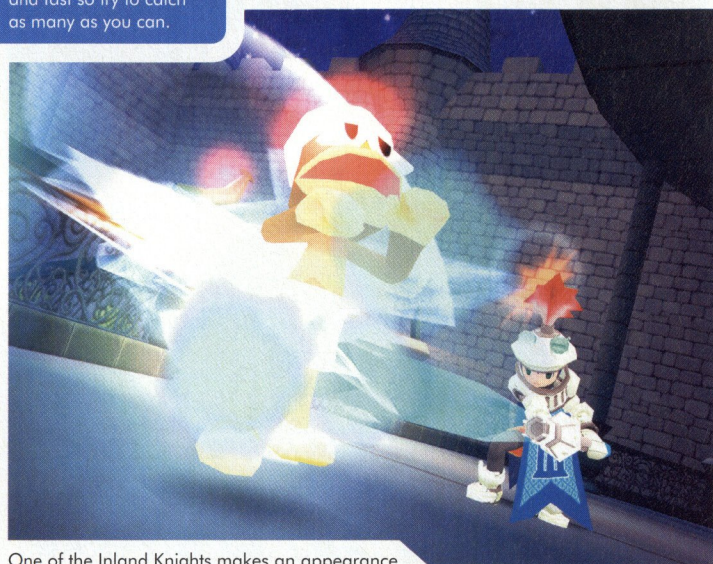
War is hell. As are average war games...



Nunchaku style monkey netting



!!! Film references fly thick and fast so try to catch as many as you can.



One of the Inland Knights makes an appearance

Ape Escape 3

DANIEL WILKS will refrain from making monkey spanking references

Cam just came back from Japan and brought with him quite possibly the most awesome thing that was ever awesome. How awesome you ask? Well, think of how awesome Breakdance 2: Electric Boogaloo and Gymkata are and then multiply that by the power of chimp. A young chimp, an ugly dog and their slightly pervy looking owner going on adventures like buying a cheesecake for a little girl only to have it smashed when the dog gets excited by a ball and runs off, making the chimp all sad is quite possibly the greatest entertainment the DVD format has to offer. It also proves that anything is better with monkeys. Imagine how dull the DVD would be without the chimp — it would just be a pervy Japanese man and his ugly dog buying a cake. That's not fun at all. Unless you're a pervy dog and cake fancier and we're pretty sure there's a Japanese DVD out there for you.

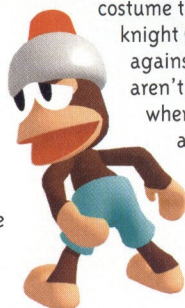
PAN AND JAMES

Ape Escape 3 is a lot of fun. Because it has monkeys. Lots of monkeys. They have escaped and you need to catch them. In this third game in

the franchise, the evil Specter has taken over television so each of the levels is themed around a movie or genre. These film parodies are at once incredibly childish but rather funny; it's hard not to chuckle at the title "Monday the 16th" for instance. Gameplay remains the same as it was in the beginning of the franchise with players running around capturing apes to progress to the next level and defeat a boss at the end of the stage. The controls revolve around using the left thumbstick for movement and the right for combat with the character attacking in the direction the thumbstick is pushed. Unlike other analogue combat games like the dull Death by Degrees or undercooked but potentially good Rise to Honor, Ape Escape 3 keeps the controls simple with no convoluted combos to learn; instead it usually takes a few swipes to take out an enemy and one well timed swing to catch an escaped ape. Aside from the monkey netting and combat, Ape Escape features a number

of gadgets to aid gameplay ranging from the Dash Hoop, a hula-style-hoop that allows you to charge short distances and a Slingshot to hit distant targets. There are a host of unlockables to discover throughout the game ranging from a brilliantly simian (and surprisingly faithful) Metal Gear Solid game through to the odd and slightly disturbing Simian Cinema clips.

The only new addition to Ape Escape 3 are costumes — special powers that are unlocked transforming you into different film characters/stereotypes that have special attacks needed to defeat the bosses at the end of the stages. Unfortunately most of the boss encounters require a specific costume to be worn, such as a knight (costume) facing off against a dragon so players aren't given a lot of choice when it comes to use. Still, the addition of costumes does add an extra dimension to the franchise and points in the right direction for the next inevitable sequel. <<



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Monkey action

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Sony

PUBLISHER: Sony

PRICE: \$79.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Monkeys, funny and charming, great controls.

MINUS: Not much new stuff.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	83	83

OVERALL

82

Spank the Monkey - dammit, couldn't resist



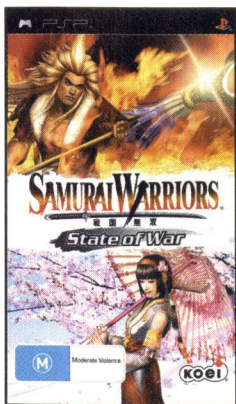
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What's your style? Try them all with 19 warriors dressed to kill, enhanced strategy, all-new scenarios, and multiplayer challenges for up to 4 players.

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Moderate
violence



[up] New infra-brown radar tech



Metroid Prime: Hunters

Most people are aware that when the Nintendo DS launched over a year ago the system came with a free demo of Metroid Prime: Hunters, dubbed "First Strike". This short taste of things to come quickly demonstrated the Metroid Prime series, as seen on the DS, playing more like a traditional first-person shooter on the PC than either of the GameCube incarnations. After what has definitely been a long wait for some, Metroid Prime: Hunters has finally made its way to the DS and is everything one could expect, and possibly a little more. After the demo demonstrated that this unique control scheme could easily work the biggest question mark hovering above Hunters during development, was if it would provide a solid play experience. The answer is without a doubt 'yes', with the biggest surprise being the inclusion of an equally fantastic multiplayer mode. Hunters' many achievements are due to not only the fact that it seamlessly utilises every aspect of the Nintendo

DS and in doing so becomes the first standout shooter for a handheld device, but also because it features the fantastic production values and depth the series is known for.

THE HUNT IS ON

Those who played the demo will be familiar with the control setup on offer here and its interpretation of the staple PC 'mouse and keyboard' interface. In Hunters the stylus is used to look and aim (i.e. the 'mouse') with both the d-pad and face buttons used to walk and strafe (the 'keyboard'), and although it will take some quite a while to get used to it (circle strafing in particular) - the setup unquestionably works. When you compare this to the control scheme seen in the GameCube titles, it becomes clear that the overall dynamics of the game will have to be changed to accommodate them. The most notable change comes from the precision controls, which in essence would render the simple pattern based 'follow and

shoot' setup that the series is known for, somewhat redundant. As a result the game has made several changes to the core Metroid Prime gameplay, as seen most notably in the single-player component. For example when facing some familiar creatures players may find themselves fending off not only multiple targets but spawn hubs too, clearly implemented to increase the intensity of even the small fire fights, and keep players constantly moving. On the other side of that spectrum players will also face against humanoid foes (such as bounty hunters) that display more advanced AI and deathmatch-style maneuverability, providing many heated head-to-head encounters not seen in the series thus far.

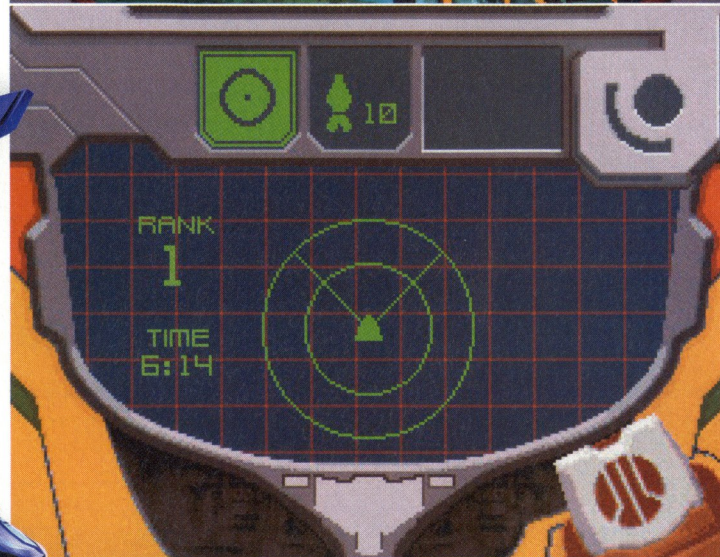
Story-wise the game starts off extremely vague as all players know is that Samus is tracking a beacon to uncover "the ultimate power". So once again you find yourself off collecting ancient artifacts on different alien worlds with the difference here being that Samus

isn't the only bounty hunter on this scavenger/treasure hunt. This aspect in particular adds a new dynamic to the back tracking and exploration aspects of the game, as artifacts can be stolen and in turn, retrieved. As seen in other Prime titles your scan visor is once again used to reveal elements of the story, yet with Hunters, it seems like it takes a lot longer to figure out exactly what's going on.

From the outset the presentation is fantastic, with great pre-rendered cinematics that utilise both screens as well as an in-depth game specific interface available whenever you're in Samus's space craft. With the game taking place in various locales much like in previous titles (industrial, barren, volcanic and so forth) each location in most instances needs to be flown to,



[up] Cue Cthon



!!! Want to play against Kosta online? I think his handle is something like "Whedon Lover" or "Firefly Fetishist"... you'll work it out.

throughout the game and their natural inclusion and execution help bridge this title to the Prime series.

QUAKETASTIC!

Hunters is the most visually impressive 3D title to hit the DS yet, with art direction taken directly from the superb GameCube installments providing environments that, although quite low in terms of polygon counts, are extremely impressive in terms of design and construction. But with the precision control scheme, the focus is less about exploration and discovery (often you may find yourself forgetting to scan objects), both hallmarks of the Prime series, with a shift towards run and gun shooting as seen in the increased pace and intensity of the battles. But where the console titles failed quite miserably, that being in the multiplayer department, Hunters excels. Supporting up to eight players offline, and up to four online, the multiplayer mode in Hunters can be compared, and favorably too, to the multiplayer seen in the seminal Quake III for PC. A huge call we know, but what will come across as the biggest surprise

PLAYERS WILL ALSO FACE OFF AGAINST BOUNTY HUNTERS, THAT DISPLAY MORE ADVANCED AI

is the fact that you're playing such a fantastic multiplayer deathmatch on a handheld. No doubt the success of this mode boils down to the control scheme, and with multiple characters (each with their own strengths and weaknesses) and arenas to choose from, this portion of the game is just as fleshed out as the adventure mode — if not more so. As well as tracking a large number of statistics the online portion includes some simple chat functionality, implemented through the DS microphone, that lets players communicate with those that are in their friends list via voice. The multiplayer mode adds incredible amounts of re-playability to the title and thanks to the precision control scheme it has helped elevate the Metroid franchise into the realm of other great online shooters, and made it the handheld equivalent of Unreal Tournament and Quake.

Kosta Andreadis

AVAILABLE ON:
DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Nintendo Software Technology
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: \$69.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: May 25

meaning that your ship acts as the main hub for the game and the only place where the game can be saved. For Metroid Prime veterans this difference will be instantly noticeable, providing a large disconnection between locations making the incremental flow and exploration that the series is known for feel less seamless. In fact, in what may be due to hardware restrictions, a few of the key environments found in the game are incredibly linear, and this is pretty remarkable coming from a Metroid game. However the various visors, beam weapons and morph ball functionality have all been implemented well with everything (including the movement area) mapped intuitively to the touch screen. Morph ball environments and puzzles can be found scattered

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	89	92
OVERALL		
91		



Super Princess Peach

After being kidnapped a ludicrous number of times by Bowser and others, it seems that Princess Peach finally got around to installing that security system, or at the very least hired a bodyguard. With this newfound protection it seems that Bowser has decided to shift gears and go straight to the source and kidnap Mario, which sees the pink dress wearing blonde (and dare I say, "hottie") from the Mario series embark on a quest to



save, as irony would have it, Mario.

Now, Nintendo aren't exactly slouches when it comes to side-scrolling platformers and Peach is indeed another great example of their intuitive level design, however with Peach at the helm the in-game palette is colourful to say the least, even for a Mario title and whereas Mario himself was a sprite little plumber, Peach is far more dainty so the overall pace of the game is brought down a couple of notches to incorporate her 'floaty' movement. Right off the bat players will immediately recognise the staple Nintendo gameplay, albeit slowed down, and to be quite honest the first half of the game is extremely easy and not all that varied once you get the hang of her abilities.

As this is a DS title the touch screen does come into play a fair bit, as players get to control the four distinct moods of Princess Peach for limited periods at a time. For example, if you activate the sad emoticon (or "blue heart thingy") to make Peach cry, her tears can make certain plants grow, or you could activate the angry emoticon to engulf the princess in flames allowing you to burn certain obstacles in your path.

All of these elements of course come into play throughout the course of the game but whenever they're necessary their requirement is telegraphed way in advance, making their inclusion not all that special. Super Princess Peach is far from being a bad game or even a bad platformer, it's actually quite enjoyable and there are plenty of bonus goodies to unlock, including some great mini-games but as a new platformer coming from Nintendo, it can only be put under the highest of scrutiny, and as a result Super Princess Peach is good, but not great.

Kosta Andreadis



[up] Mario questioning for a little equality

AVAILABLE ON:
DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Nintendo

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	75	73

OVERALL

73

Age of Empires: THE AGE OF KINGS

To try and make Age of Empires 'work' as a handheld title must have been a pretty daunting task, especially when you consider how recognisable the series' gameplay has become over the years. Developer Backbone was wise to look at the one handheld strategy series that has grown from strength to strength in the handheld world, and used that as a template to bring Age of Empires: The Age of

Kings to Nintendo DS. That series of course is Advance Wars and it's surprising how well Age of Empires works as a turn-based title.

Okay, so gone is the real-time nature of the PC version, replaced by a turn based system that manages to implement all the main features that the series is known for. For example, advancing your civilisation through the ages is handled quite intuitively with players being able to research one technology per day (turn). Structure and unit production is handled in the same fashion with construction and training each taking a day to complete. Combat itself is quite similar to Advance Wars where unit types and battles form an almost chess-like relationship with spear men being good against cavalry and so forth. But, with the implementation of staple PC RTS elements such as upgrading armour, technologies and various unit types, Age of Kings is definitely more complicated than the almost simplistic nature of the combat found in Advance Wars.

As the title suggests the game's civilisations and setting takes place during the middle ages with players able to control Japanese,

English, French and Persian troops with the campaign in particular following historical conflicts such as the French (led by Joan of Arc) fighting an English invasion. The campaign mode is lengthy, difficult, and rewarding with numerous bonus items available for purchase such as new units and maps.

Multiplayer is naturally included, but unfortunately doesn't include an online mode which would have been fantastic if implemented. But, as it stands, Age of Empires turned out exceptionally well on DS and is a must buy for strategy fans and those that were (and still are) enamored with Advance Wars.

Kosta Andreadis

AVAILABLE ON:
DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Backbone/Ensemble Studios

PUBLISHER: Majesco

PRICE: \$TBA

RATING: G

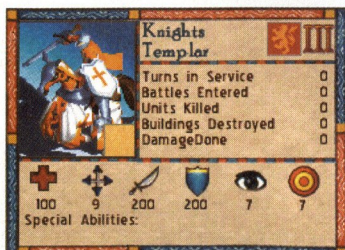
AVAILABLE: TBA



VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	83	86

OVERALL

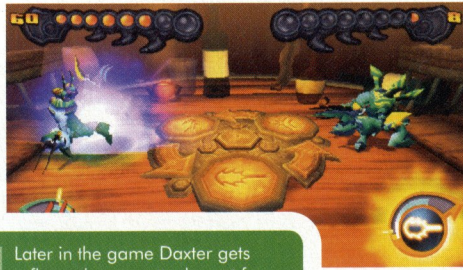
85



[up] Hooray for the Knights of the Temple



What exactly is Daxter anyway?



!!! Later in the game Daxter gets a flame thrower attachment for his bug spray, which is not only useful for taking out enemies and hovering, but also factors into some cool puzzles.



The only solution to a marshmallow infestation

Daxter

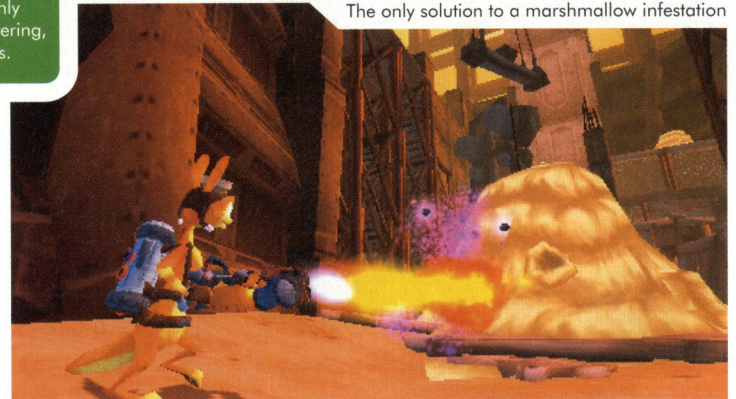
Welcome one and all to the best platformer the PSP currently has to offer. Forget all those rubbish console ports and slapdash efforts that have been piling up on retail shelves, this is a game developed from the ground up exclusively for PSP and it shows. It's also a new title in the acclaimed Jak & Daxter series, developed by Ready at Dawn, a new studio whose head is a former Naughty Dog member. We've shaken the Hyper Magic Eightball and it told us "all signs point to fun", and indeed it is.

DAXTER 'CHARMING' MCSUAVE

Daxter takes place after the events of The Precursor Legacy, when Jak gets carted off to gaol and endures all manner of cruel experiments. While rescuing Jak is certainly at the back of his mind, Daxter falls into a job as a bug exterminator in Haven City. Cue the usual platform set-up: big hub city to explore, levels to complete, dealies to collect. Fortunately, if Daxter did indeed have a last name (something like McSuave), then his middle name would certainly be 'Charming'. From the outset Daxter is a likeable and well voiced character, with first rate animations and well produced cutscenes. Don't fool yourself, Daxter the game doesn't

have the same visual detail as his console counterparts, but this is up there as one of the most impressive looking PSP titles to date. Haven City is large and bustling (although there is a bit of slowdown), levels have that colourful and vibrant look that the first J&D game did, and you'll face off against some pretty monstrous bosses.

While a very linear experience, Daxter has a good ability set. He can string together some pretty decent attacks with his fly swatter, can climb certain walls, crawl through vents, use zip lines, trampolines, vehicles and so on. It's the bug spray, however, that is most useful. Obviously 'inspired' by Super Mario Sunshine, this little device allows you to spray bugs (no surprises there), immobilising them for the kill, but you can also use it to hover for short periods, and with regular recharge spots, many of the movement puzzles in the game are based around using the hover ability. Fortunately, Daxter controls really well — he's responsive and the analogue nub works well. There are some niggles, such as attack animations that can take you straight off ledges and into the abyss, but the very generous checkpoint system means that frustrations are few and far between. The flipside,



however, is that Daxter as a whole isn't hugely challenging — it's not until a fair way in that the difficulty starts to ramp up a little.

The story is also pretty non-existent for the most part. You finish a level and you go to the next one. It's not a huge problem, but a little more flavour would have been nice. Still, there are some simple dream sequence mini-games to play, such as a spoof of the 100 Agent Smiths fight scene from The Matrix II: Neo's Boogaloo which, while not exactly enthralling, are still quite amusing to check out.

Daxter is a great game for platforming greenhorns, but the veterans will probably get the least out of it. Despite its charm and polish there really isn't that much that we haven't seen before. It's certainly very good, but the sense of déjà vu holds it back from a 90% score.

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:

DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer

PLAYERS: 1-4

DEVELOPER: Ready at Dawn

PUBLISHER: Sony

PRICE: \$79.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	88	83

OVERALL

86



PoPoLoCrois

I'll say this at the outset; the best thing about PoPoLoCrois is the name. Yell it out in a crowded place (like a Korean BBQ during a friend's birthday dinner - sorry about that Amos) with an exaggerated French accent and you'll know the power of the word. Aside from the rocking name, PoPoLoCrois is a fun but rather standard little handheld RPG with a decent story, some good controls and seriously muddled flow.

Players take the role of Pietro, a young prince of Popolocrois, setting off to find a way to save his mother from a coma so the land can defend itself from an evil demony type guy. The story is simple and charming but it is this same charming simplicity that ultimately proves to be the downfall of the game. The controls and combat are very basic with a turn based system featuring standard attacks, special attacks, magic and little depth. In this sense it works as a 'my first RPG' type of experience but if you come to the game looking for any real depth you will come away sorely disappointed. The story necessitates a hell of a lot of walking from one place to another as well of a whole heap of backtracking - not such a bad thing if you enjoy exploration but the combination of very frequent random battles and long load times when entering a new area slow down the overall pace of the narrative to a crawl. This may all sound very critical and for the most part it is but on the whole PoPoLoCrois isn't actually a bad game, it's just too simple and poorly paced to appeal to veterans of RPGs.

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:

DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1 /

DEVELOPER: G-Artists / **PUBLISHER:** Agetec Inc /

PRICE: \$79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
72	68	70	70



Mario Smash Football

Let's get one thing out of the way right now. Mario Smash Football is WAY better than Mario Baseball. Mario may be a sell-out but at least this game is fun - think Sega Soccer Slam (same developer actually) but less lumbering and with excellent animations.

Smash Football seems like utter chaos at first. Shells are getting fired all over the place, the usually friendly denizens of the Mushroom Kingdom are checking each other ruthlessly, spectacular goals are being scored and every so often a two storey high Bowser drops down onto the pitch and starts breathing flames in all directions. It's chaos, but it's actually pretty easy to get into. All the basics are there - passes, lobbed passes, shots on goal, chips, jinks, slide tackles and body checks. Take a shot on goal and you'll get an item. These can be used to clear a path in front of you or as a last resort to stop an opponent scoring. Checking an opposing player without the ball, on the other hand, gives them an item, but chances are you'll find it hard to resist checking Peach into the electrified fences around the field and watching her sizzle. It's also pretty entertaining playing with friends and having them knocking players aside to give you a clear run at the goal. On top of this, each team has a Captain who has access to a Super Shot. It takes a while to wind up but if you get the timing right you'll fire the ball (and the goalie) into the back of the net and score two goals. It's good fun, although the AI is prone to cheating in the hardest cup, so you may want to play 2 vs 2 to negate the AI.

In short, if you have four controllers, three friends and a Cube, Smash Football is pretty good fun. Just don't expect to be playing it much on your own.

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade Soccer / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 /

DEVELOPER: Next Level Games / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo /

PRICE: \$99.95 / **RATING:** PG / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	79	82	78



SOCOM: US Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo

SEALs' "Sandman" and his trusty partner "Lonestar" are two bad-assed American military hombres, and they're cleaning up the world. As a two-man team, they can play any role from sniper to heavy weapons specialist, with silencers, thermal scopes and rocket launchers.

Your adventure takes you sequentially through the dusty mountains of Chile, its capital then on to Africa, and finally to Poland for the showdown. Overall, the landscape and indoor environments are adequately detailed, although a bit sparse in parts.

In its journey to PSP, SOCOM has retained many of the staple military-shooter features that you would expect to find. Weapons have multiple rates of fire. You can now swim. Your NPC teammate follows basic instructions. Crouching and going prone increases accuracy, but makes it slightly harder for multiplayer opponents to target lock you. An eyeball icon at the bottom of the screen indicates your level of concealment. By hiding in shadows and near cover, the indicator will turn darker.

The gameplay style is still classic SOCOM, with enemy encounters that are short and sharp. But significantly, it has been given an auto-aim function. You can virtually relax and just tap the auto-aim button regularly to target enemies (which also detects them in the dark). However, the accuracy of shots fired towards locked targets depends on your stance and rate of movement.

The friendly and enemy AI has a few hiccups, but is satisfactory most of the time. Multiplayer Fire Team Bravo is playable online and now supports 32 players. Overall, SOCOM on PSP is very playable, easily the best multiplayer FPS on the platform.

Ed Dawson

AVAILABLE ON:

DS / PSP / GBA

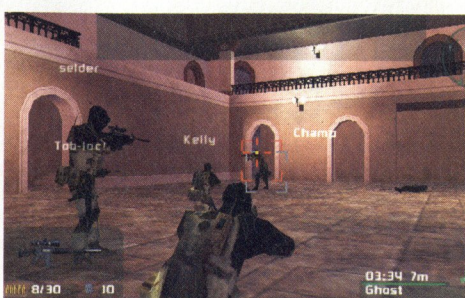
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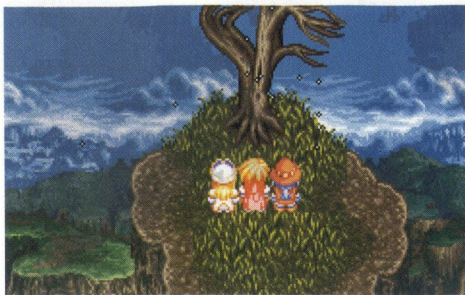
CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-32 Online and ad-hoc /

DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive / **PUBLISHER:** Sony /

PRICE: \$79.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	90	88	87





Tales of Phantasia

There is a good and bad side to picking up an old game and porting it to a new platform. On the up side there is the sense of nostalgia that can be gained from playing a game from your childhood. There is also a sense of completion if you have played later games in the franchise. On the down side, the games can, unsurprisingly, feel somewhat dated. Tales of Phantasia is one of these games.

The first in the Namco "Tales" series, Tales of Phantasia was first released some ten years ago on the SNES and until now has not been officially translated into English. The major point that keeps Phantasia ahead of the crowd is the "Linear Motion Battle System", a real time combat system that sees the player's party lined up single file and following the player's actions. A great idea in theory (and it worked well on Tales of Eternia on PSP) but Phantasia suffers from some chronic slowdown that makes every fight feel like the combatants are struggling through a tarpit to make an attack. Whether the slowdown is deliberate or a side effect of the port from SNES to GBA is anyone's guess but it does hurt the flow of the game.

The design and story of the game, on the other hand, are great. Upon coming home from a hunting trip a young swordsman named Cress Albane returns home to find his family dead and sets off on a journey that will take him through time to find the culprit. The story allows the player a good degree of exploration and side tracking — a trait that would be nice to see in a lot more modern RPGs.

Dirk Watch

AVAILABLE ON:

DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1 /

DEVELOPER: Namco / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo /

PRICE: \$69.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS

72

SOUND

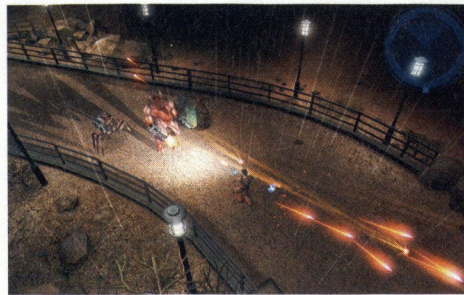
74

GAMEPLAY

65

OVERALL

65



Shadowgrounds

It seems a few years too late for a new company to launch a top down action game but that is exactly what Frozenbyte, a first time Finnish development team have done with Shadowgrounds. It would be all too easy dismissing the game as being a bit of a relic of the Diablo era but that would dismiss the charms that the game actually has. Set on a freshly terraformed and colonised Ganymede, shortly after a reactor breach that killed a number of workers, Shadowgrounds casts the player as Wesley Tyler, a senior mechanic, called upon one dark and lonely night to fix the power which has inexplicably gone out. From then on in it's a case of running through the various facilities and environments in the dark, fixing machinery and battling some omnipresent and creepy beasties, the cause of all the problems.

The action isn't all that crash hot to be honest, especially because the keyboard/mouse controls are a little rough but the overall design and mood of the game point to some great things to come from the first time developers. As most of the game is shrouded in darkness, one of the central conceits of the game is the need for a shoulder mounted flashlight, meaning that you can only have a clear picture of what is going on in one direction at a time. Add to this the fact that the battery only has a finite amount of power before needing to recharge and you will soon find yourself afraid of the dark. Although the character models themselves are a little ho-hum, the level design, mood and coherent creature design work well in context.

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1 /

DEVELOPER: Frozenbyte / **PUBLISHER:** Aurant /

PRICE: \$49.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS

80

SOUND

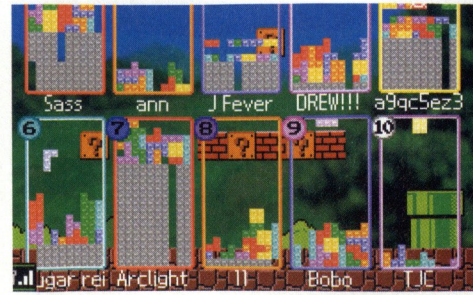
78

GAMEPLAY

78

OVERALL

76



Tetris DS

If you're not familiar with Tetris then you shouldn't be reading this magazine. It seems like every year the venerable puzzle game has another version foisted onto the market. This year's version is different. Sure, it contains all the Tetris goodness that you expect from a Tetris title but there are also a few tweaks to make it both a little more Nintendo flavoured and DS tailored as well. The Nintendo flavouring is simply a soundtrack and a veneer but the DS exclusive game mode is a thing of beauty.

Aptly named Touch, this new mode changes the regular Tetris game into a slow, though provoking puzzle. Instead of falling blocks, the Touch mode challenges the player to move and rotate a pillar of Tetris blocks to make lines to lower a cage to the ground. Due to the lack of any timer the game is a lot more thoughtful, though definitely less exciting than the standard falling block game but it works brilliantly. Pushing blocks around and being able to think about what you are doing next is wonderful and the sense of accomplishment when you rack up a couple of lines in a combo is great.

The Nintendo flavouring is like icing on the cake for Nintendo fanboys but for everyone else it comes across as a little unnecessary. Sure, it's nice hearing the Zelda theme rather than the usual Tetris music but it does nothing for the game. Neither does the (sometimes distracting) appearance of numerous Nintendo characters. We haven't been able to test it yet but apparently the game has some pretty sweet wireless multiplayer as well!

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:

DS / PSP / GBA

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Puzzle / **PLAYERS:** 1-10 /

DEVELOPER: Nintendo / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo /

PRICE: \$TBA / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS

70

SOUND

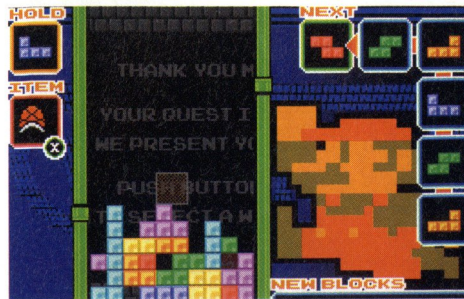
81

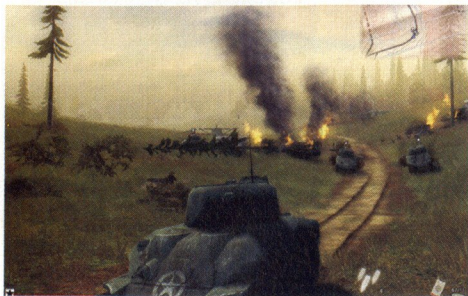
GAMEPLAY

91

OVERALL

90





Panzer Elite Action: Fields of Glory

For most of us, the tank sim genre is pretty much a non-event. Sure, it's produced its fair share of cult successes; it's just that it's not particularly interesting. Tanks, it seems, are only fun when you're able to jump in and out of them at will in shooters like Red Orchestra and Battlefield 2.

ZootFly, however, still think they can attract a following. Their first notable release, Panzer Elite Action, isn't a hardcore simulation. Rather, it's a fast-paced action game that aims to make the whole business of commanding a tank and leading a platoon as accessible and entertaining as possible.

You play from a third person perspective, using WASD to move (in the PC version, obviously) while controlling the turret with the mouse. Two buttons cycle through a list of basic commands (i.e. flank, stop, follow me), making the process of bossing the platoon around incredibly simple.

In short, Panzer Elite Action is the CoD of tank games. It's fun and easy to get into. If you happen to screw up, the maps are dotted with service stations and supply drops that instantly repair your tank and restock your ammunition. There are three campaigns: Russian, German and American.

The game is no slouch in the technical department, either. While it's no Half-Life 2: Lost Coast, it looks good. The smoke and dust effects in particular are quite impressive. Friendly AI is reasonably clued, although the enemy infantry could have done with some work. The sound, however, is a bit too quiet.

For what it is, Panzer Elite Action is great. While it's unlikely that it will distract people from Battlefield 2, it's definitely worth a look if you're after something different.

Christopher Taylor

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Tank sim / **PLAYERS:** 1-32 / **DEVELOPER:** ZootFly / **PUBLISHER:** JoWood / **PRICE:** \$69.95 PC, \$89.95 Xbox & PS2 / **RATING:** M / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	70	80	80



Rampage: Total Destruction

Rampage was never particularly good when it was in the arcades all those years ago. It was samey and dull and the controls kind of sucked for the most part. Rampage: Total Destruction attempts to modernise the dated gameplay by sticking it in a semi-3D isometric world, adding more monsters and a number of arbitrary challenges to unlock special monster powers and new monsters that require luck instead of skill. Controls are jumbled and inaccurate making it hard to hit what you are aiming for but too easy to knock down buildings you are trying to take apart piece by piece. The new monster models look fine but lack even the cursory attempts at personality the original characters had. The power-up level missions require the player (usually) to eat a number of one type of item. These only appear when you smash holes in buildings and are not credited if the building falls down before you grab it, making progress entirely based around luck rather than any type of skill.

Even the move to semi-3D comes across as bad, as often you will not easily be able to discern which buildings can be destroyed and which ones are background decoration until you've wasted valuable time checking them out. The whole thing comes across as an evil conspiracy between Midway and a third party peripherals manufacturer to frustrate and infuriate you to such an extent with crappy gameplay and worse controls to smash whatever controller you are holding to prompt you to buy a new one. I'm on to you Midway. I can see through your schemes. Even at \$49.95 it's not worth the agro.

Vanilla Moe

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Retro crud / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Pipeworks / **PUBLISHER:** Midway / **PRICE:** \$49.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
48	55	35	32



UberSoldier

UberSoldier is a WWII shooter that was developed on the cheap. Unsurprisingly, it shows: the graphics are bland, the AI is daft and (if memory serves me correctly) the voice acting is reminiscent of Iron Chef's infamous dubbing, with all of the characters speaking in a weird sort of accent-free, Babelfish English.

The plot's pretty much what you'd expect. You play Karl Stolz, a German officer who dies and gets resurrected as part of some "psychopathic" experiment. Kind of like that whole Lazarus thing I guess, only with less Jesus and more Nazis.

Naturally, the experiment comes complete with a stupid catch: the reincarnated Stolz will only listen to the first person he sees when he regains consciousness. As it happens, he's just getting up for his morning piss when some random woman bursts into his room and orders him to kill everyone. That kind of thing happens to me all the time.

On a side note, the rebel chick looks like a Reject Shop version of Alyx from Half-Life 2.

The gameplay is standard run and gun fodder: it's not as bad as spooning your eyeballs out, but it's not exactly fun either. The only really 'unique' feature is your ability to project a force field which can protect you and any nearby friendlies from enemy bullets. It's kind of neat, but it's hardly going to save this game from the cesspool of mediocrity.

This game has simply nothing to offer, aside from the odd moment of unintentional comedy (kind of like one of those midday movies starring one of the Baldwin brothers). Spend your money on some bargain bin classics instead.

Christopher Taylor

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Burut / **PUBLISHER:** CDV / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** TBA / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
65	65	40	35



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This better be coming to console



Line-Kill Spirits

SALLY WOELLNER puts her Nana obsession aside for a moment...

Hello, and welcome to tonight's episode of 'What The Hell Is Wrong With Japanese People'. I'm your host, Sally, and if I'm lucky I'll get to the end of this review without having to mention tentacles in detail.

INNOVATION!

So, panties. They have an almost talismanic allure - they're greater than the sum of their delicate, pastel cotton and lace parts. I'm going to warn you, if you're utterly sick of stretchy, lacy undergarments, you'd probably better stop reading - because in this instalment of WTHIWWJP, we'll examine a brand new phenomenon: The Panty-Shot Fighting Game.

Line-Kill Spirits is a 3D fighting game created by a group of amateur game programmers. What sets it apart from other similar anime-styled 3Ders is the arguably ingenious (and arguably incredibly odd) panty-shot mechanism. When you damage your opponent, their health will gradually regenerate over time - unless you use your camera to "shoot a glimpse into panty", as their manual quaintly puts it. Then

their latent damage is converted into actual damage - and, of course, you can only end the match with a giant, screen-swallowing photograph of their underwear. As we so often say: "Only in Japan".

While this sounds like a simple gimmick, it does change the way you fight. You need to use certain moves to expose your opponent's panties, then "press shooting bottom timely to click away with your camera, upon a hem of skit flapping" (seriously, the manual makes this game). It's a refreshingly creative element in the 3D fighting world.

It helps that the character design is quite charming, and each character has a few emotive facial expressions in-game. The character's body language, posture, (and choice of panties) suit their personalities, and the whole game looks pretty cute, if somewhat simplistic. It's a shame that nearly every character is wearing the same blue outer coat in-game.

Another thing to be noted is that some of the girls look rather... young. This may be a side-effect of the cutesy character design, but even taking that into account...

basically, if having two under aged and wide-eyed lolitastic girls staring happily out from the select screen is going to be a problem for you, you might want to avoid this one.

Also on the down side, the variety in the character art isn't reflected in the moves. Everyone has exactly the same button combos for their one punch, one kick, two special moves and extra-special move. So although the awesomely cracktastic moves are fun to watch (blood-vomiting! Wooden horses! Flying cats!), there's no variation in how you achieve them.

Which is sad, because it's cool to see some innovation in fighters, even if it is based on something as well... flimsy... as panties. Though it "was" put together by an amateur game group, so it's unfair to expect the same level of depth that you would from something produced by a well-financed team. Hopefully if they keep creating games, they'll be able to inject more variety to compliment their panty-fuelled creativity.

Next on WTHIWWJP: Gay Pro-Wrestling Vampire or ManGirl in Callots - Which Is Right For You? <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: 3D fighter

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Game Programming Study Club • PUBLISHER: Online

PRICE: US\$12.17

RATING: TBC

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Cute art, creative take on 3D fighting, funny.

MINUS: Boringly same-ish controls, simple game.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
69	75	64

OVERALL

70

Cute, fun idea, but lacks depth and staying power.



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Links

» by Kosta "Hail Xenu" Andreadis



Free Satellite Imagery: A Love Story

» **Smart Science-y Guy:** "Hey, what's happening there with you, dude! Have you ever seen one of those hip movies where they track criminals and international terrorists via satellite?"

Internet Dude: "Yeah, I guess. But those movies usually suck ass."

Smart Science-y Guy: "Ahem, well. What if I said you could have updated satellite imagery automatically downloaded, get this - to your desktop computer!"

Mortal Kombat 3 Fan From The 90s (interrupts): "Man, I just compiled myself performing every single fatality from Mortal Kombat 3!"

Internet Dude: "Sweet, send me the link."

- codefromthe70s.org/desktopearth_dl.asp
- <http://www.fazed.org/video/embed/?id=88>



After HD, the search for intelligent life, and better TV

» The HD era is upon us, giving us entertainment in higher resolution and sweet digital sound. With crisp, clean images so crisp and clean that their crispness and cleanliness is off the C&C (Crisp and Clean, not the Music Factory) charts, one can only wonder, what's next? Where do we go from here? And to be honest, no one really knows where the human race is headed. Are we alone in the universe? Possibly, but have you seen the universe? It's huge, and you simply can't get any bigger than the universe as we see it today - unless it keeps expanding. So who knows, aliens might visit us tomorrow and they'll have TVs so awesome our heads will explode. Or, they might enslave the human race and harvest us for food.

- <http://www.plastk.net/>



Tonight's Top 10 List

» **TOP 10 WAYS TO PLEASE YOUR EDITOR:**

10. Give him a foot massage.
9. Buy him Full House: The Complete Collection on DVD (because like all blondes, he has a thing for John Stamos).
8. Mention his name emphatically in a write-up.
7. Cam! 6. Impersonate Buffy on the phone and tell him "Hey Cam, this is Buffy. Just want to let you know that Wilks is a vampire. Oh, and I can see you in the bushes."
5. Reply, "It wasn't me" when accused of hiding a dead hooker in the trunk of his car.
4. Find a better place to get rid of the body, and stop drinking immediately.
3. Buy him a mug that says "World's Greatest Editor".
2. Give back both his diary and prescription medication.
1. As requested, stop calling him Camswell Mc Sherrington.

- www.techeblog.com/index.php/tech-gadget/top-10-strangest-lego-creations



Yabba Dabba Doo!

» What if The Simpsons were live action? Wouldn't that be interesting or possibly even, "awesome"? No it wouldn't. Now, what would be awesome would be a live action version of, The Flintstones! They could cast John Goodman as Fred Flintstone, Rick Moranis as Barney Rubble and Dino will be entirely CG. As for the female cast, they could cast Halle Berry in some role to bring some prestige (and Oscars baby!) to the affair and Rosie O'Donnell for hilarity. Man, this movie writes itself! What's also great about the idea is that it would be timeless - no one would ever forget something like a live action Flintstones movie.

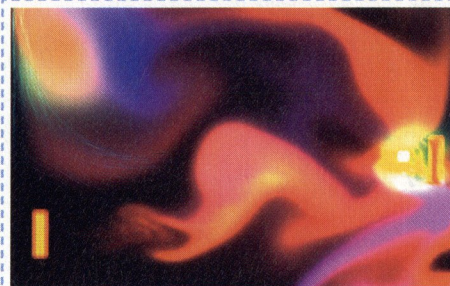
- www.thesun.co.uk/article/0,,2004580002-2006100428,00.html
- video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2231271827736577327&q=live+simpsons
- www.imdb.com/title/tt0109813/



He's from Melmac

» Many people seem to think that Alf is a relic of the 80s, a fad long forgotten and star of a sitcom that in the end wasn't all that funny. Many people also believe that Crash is an amazing film. These people are wrong, how can a fuzzy alien (with catchphrases) that's always getting himself into various "situations" and "scenarios" be anything but hilarious? And how can a film featuring Sandra Bullock and Brendan Fraser, as husband and wife mind you and rapper Ludacris as a voice of reason, be amazing? Comedy isn't witty banter between fleshed out characters - it is puppets, one liners and a laugh track. And lessons about life aren't learnt from films that deal with racism, it comes at the end of each episode accompanied by an "awwwwww" track. I kill me.

- www.retrojunk.com/details_tvshows/18-alf/
























Singing the Same Old Pong

» Certain game makers strive for originality, looking for new ways to engage players with interactive entertainment. Said makers might even look down at a market flooded with game concepts and mechanics that have been around for years, and they might even say that the situation has become stagnant. Yet there's definitely room for both originality and the recycling of ideas and gameplay - take Pong for example. Here we have an archaic game in two re-incarnations, one as an interesting particle simulator and the other as an online multiplayer game. Holy crap, was that a serious links write-up? Quick, think of a joke. Hmm, running out of room, only have space for a funny name. How about, "Camswell Mc Sherrington". Oh bugger.

- www.plasmapong.com/
- <http://pong.flash-gear.com/>

HYPER GAME RETAILER LISTING

	STORE NAME	LOCATION	PLATFORMS SOLD
	Berlin Wall Software Supermarket www.berlinwall.com.au	408 King William St, Adelaide SA. Ph: 08 8231 4799	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA, Mac,
	bGamer www.bgamer.com.au	Online Retailer	PS2, PSP, MP3 Players
	City Software www.citysoftware.com.au	3/222 Latrobe St, Melbourne VIC PH: 03 9250 6900; Shop 7 & 8, 111 Pacific Hwy. North Sydney NSW 2060	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA
	Devoted DVD www.devoted.com.au	Shop 5, Rovergom Village, South Mar-rang VIC. Ph: 03 9436 4566	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA
	Dick Smith Electronics / Dick Smith Powerhouse www.dse.com.au	http://dse.findnearest.com.au/	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, Gameboy, GBA.
	DVD Crave www.dvdcrave.com.au	Shop 1/471 Payneham Road, Felixstow SA. Ph: 08 8365 5231	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA,
	EB Games no website	Please go to your nearest EB Games store	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA
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	Game Traders www.gametradars.com.au	Please go to your nearest Game Traders store	PC, PS2, DS, Xbox, Xbox 360, PSP, Gamecube, GBA,
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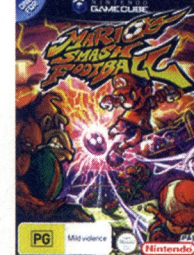
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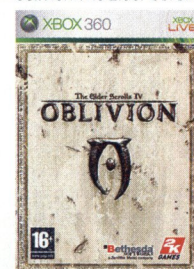
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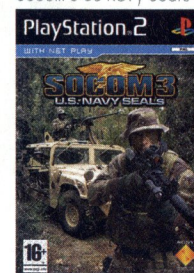
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That hat/beard combo = WIN!



The Water Margin

SIREN, MA 15+

If you have any type of love for martial arts films, or Shaw Bros films in particular you need to do yourself a favour and pick up a copy of *The Water Margin*, an epic (in every sense of the word) historical action picture based around a scant few chapters of the truly epic ancient Chinese book telling the story of 108 heroes who helped protect the Emperor against the evil Sung Dynasty (12th Century). How epic you ask? Well, just about every Shaw Bros star plays a major role in the film — the opening introductions of all of the characters (with helpful on screen titles giving you the names of both the actors and characters who appear on screen) takes nearly a full ten minutes.

One of star/director Chang Cheh's greatest works, ranking up there with *Five Element Ninja*, the story of *The Water Margin* is too complex to convey in such a small space but for spectacle alone it is worth a watch; hundreds of characters, thousands of extras and fight scenes that have a brutal intensity about them instead of pretty choreography.

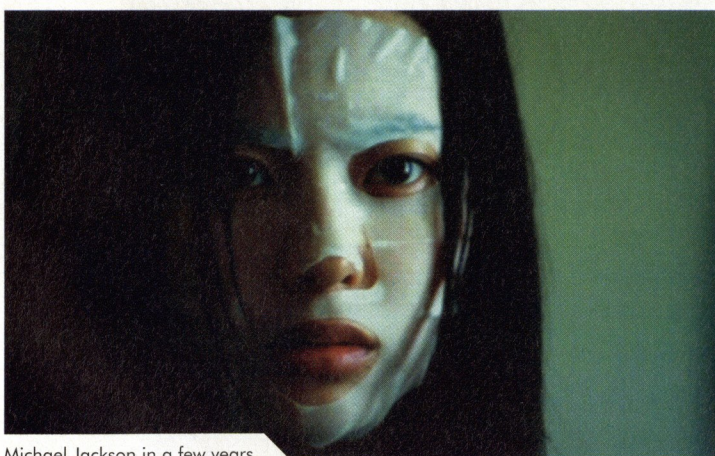


[up] Power Groin Thrust technique

With so many characters it does sometimes become a little confusing but the sheer momentum of the film carries you through those rough patches. The restored print is beautiful and the audio track crisp but special mention has to be made about the wildly anachronistic soundtrack that sounds like Ennio Morricone by way of funk. It's odd, hard to get a handle on but like the rest of the film will pull you in.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6



Michael Jackson in a few years



Ab-Normal Beauty

SIREN, MA 15+

There's something in the film *Ab-Normal Beauty* creepier than the premise of a young morose woman named Jiney who becomes obsessed with photographing death after witnessing a fatal car accident and the ensuing will-she-or-won't-she story about whether her obsession will lead her to making dead people rather than searching for them.

What is even creepier is that Director Oxide Pang has cast sisters Race Wong and Rosanne Wong (of the Cantopop group R2) as friends and potential lesbian lovers in an obvious attempt to install an omni-present sense of "wrongness" for want of a better word in every frame. Even without knowing about the sisters (though the family resemblance is quite noticeable), *Ab-Normal Beauty* still ranks up there as an above average thriller thanks more to the assured direction of Oxide Pang, a man who is becoming one of the hottest names in HK with films such as *Bangkok Dangerous*, *The Eye* and *The Eye 2* and a compelling turn from first time actor Race Wong, who, although isn't called on to



[up] Can't see our pop-stars doing this

portray much more than a morose fascination with death still manages to steal every scene from her co-stars.

Unfortunately the film degenerates in the third act to being more of a mean spirited stalk and slash, leaving the far more interesting question of whether Jiney will start killing people to feed her obsession behind. The DVD contains some nice, though limited special features including a making of and some deleted scenes.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 6

Eko Eko Azarak: WIZARD OF DARKNESS

EASTERN EYE, R 18+

Kind of like a gory Japanese *Buffy*, the first *Eko Eko Azarak* film introduces audiences to Misa Kuroi, a young witch with a past shrouded in death who transfers to a new school, only to become embroiled in a plot to resurrect Lucifer with the blood sacrifice of thirteen students. Naturally the teenage witch is the only one who can stop it. Yes, the plot is very silly but it is a nice setup for some clever kills, a nice bit of gore and a refreshingly bleak world view devoid of any out of place comedy, though wry black comedy abounds.

Now eleven years old, *Eko Eko Azarak: Wizard of Darkness* has become one of the best known Japanese horror films so it's nice to finally have a local release. Essentially a Japanese take on Hollywood teen horror, *Wizard of Darkness* succeeds more through the straightforward approach than through technical merits as the

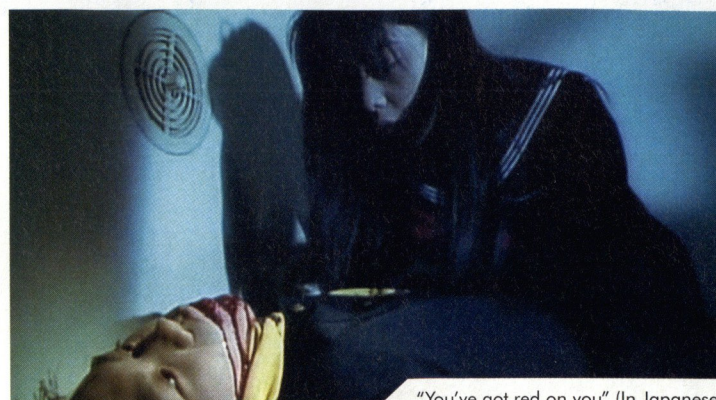


[up] Ah to be in a Japanese school

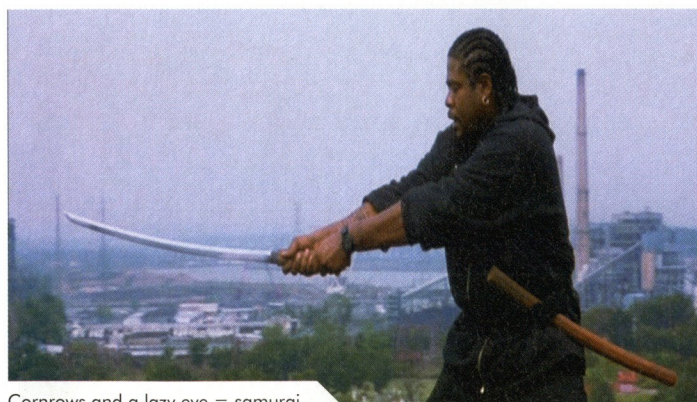
meagre budget of the film shows in nearly every frame. Although derivative of Hollywood fare, *Eko Eko Azarak* still manages to remain uniquely Japanese with elements such as lesbian affairs between schoolgirls and/or teachers and the willingness to use gore instead of suggestion when it comes to screen kills. Unfortunately it's still not a particularly good film but if you have a couple of beers or some friends around, *Wizard of Darkness* is quite an enjoyable little stab at supernatural horror.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 6



"You've got red on you" (In Japanese)



Cornrows and a lazy eye = samurai

Ghost Dog: THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI

MADMAN, M 15+

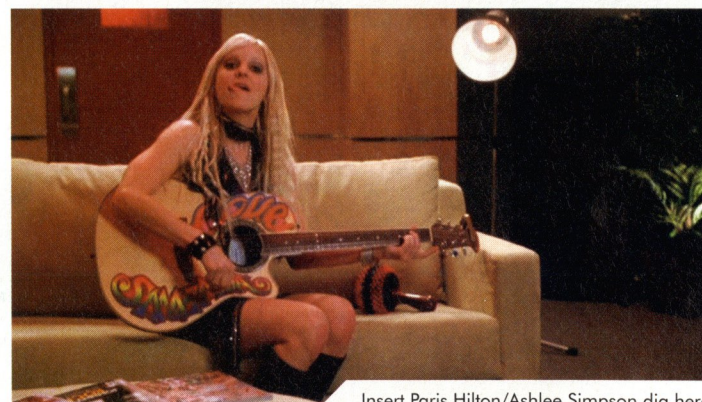
Ghost Dog works on two levels almost as profoundly; as a bleakly humorous urban parable about loneliness, desperation and a search for meaning, and also as a character study of an insane man. Forest Whitaker's Ghost Dog is clearly, though sweetly, unhinged. He is a near vagrant black hitman who does contracts for the mob, follows the Samurai code, is paid only once a year on the first day of autumn, communicates with his mob contact via carrier pigeon and is best friends with a Haitian ice cream man who speaks no English while Ghost Dog speaks no French. He is a desperately lonely character, clinging to an archaic code of honour as a lifeline and, after being betrayed by the mob and hunted as punishment

for a hit they paid him to carry out, lumbers towards self destruction with a grim determination.

Writer/director Jim Jarmusch is no stranger to making odd films (*Mystery Train*, *Night on Earth*, *Dead Man*) and *Ghost Dog* is no exception. He mixes Hakagure: The Way of the Samurai, hip hop (a wonderfully evocative soundtrack by RZA), mafia stereotypes and an obsession with cartoons into a compelling whole. There is a certain level of pretension to *Ghost Dog* but the wonderful performance by Forest Whitaker will make you forget about the absurdities of the story and instead force you to empathise for the desperately sad and lonely modern day samurai.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: TBA



Insert Paris Hilton/Ashlee Simpson dig here

Just Friends

MAGNA PACIFIC, MA 15+

How often do you see Hyper reviewing a romantic comedy? The dreaded rom-com is one our most hated enemies but every now and then one comes along that manages to amuse. *Just Friends* survives on the chemistry between the leads, due, in large part to the charm of star Ryan Reynolds. Reynolds plays Chris, a former fatty who never had the chance to express his love for his best friend and instead was relegated to the "friend zone". After a terrible rejection at a party, Chris flees to Hollywood, trims down, gets a high paying job in the recording industry and becomes a womanising jerk. After a sequence of contrived events that sees him reunited with a sociopathic pop diva (a reliably over the top

Anna Farris) and an emergency landing on a flight destined for Paris, Chris finds himself back at the family home over the Christmas holidays and trying to win back his old flame, Jamie (Amy Smart).

The funniest parts of the film come not so much from the plot as from inconsequential sequences that see the characters interacting in a far more casual way, such as the frequent fights between Chris and his younger brother; both grapple, slap, pinch and punch each other as though they've been doing it all their lives. More of a guilty pleasure than a good film, *Just Friends* still manages to throw some amusingly accurate jabs at the pitfalls of becoming seen as nothing more than a friend.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: TBA



Twin X also seems to have destroyed the hairdressing industry

Gilgamesh: CHILDREN OF THE APOCALYPSE

PRODUCTION: GROUP TAC
GENRE: POST APOCALYPTIC THRILLER

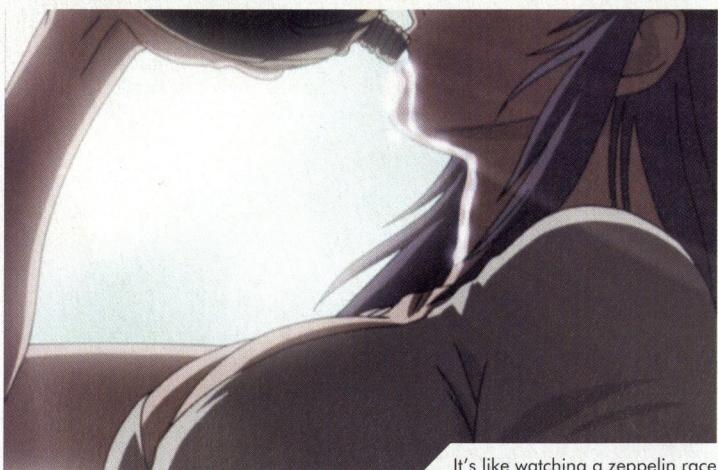
Unsurprisingly with a name like *Gilgamesh*, the anime roughly follows the story of the 7th century Sumerian King Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu. If you're unfamiliar with the story it really doesn't matter though. Set in the year 20XX, *Gilgamesh* tells the tale of a world gone wild after an incident known as Twin X and the Sheltering Sky. In the time before the series is set, the Heaven's Gate research facility was built on top of Gilgamesh's tomb in the hopes of harnessing the supernatural energy to aid the evolution of mankind. For reasons as yet not revealed, a scientist called Enkidu orchestrated a massive reactor breach sending out an EMP pulse that destroyed all of the world's computers and left a mirrored electromagnetic corona around the Earth known as The Sheltering Sky. The series follows the adventures of Enkidu's two children, Kiyoko and Tatsuya, on the run from debt collectors and falling in with two groups of powerful psychics, both of whom

believe that the two children harbour great powers and will be the key to winning the war for mankind's future.

The series refuses to paint things in black and white so much of the enjoyment of the first episodes is trying to work out which powerful group is actually on the side of good. The shades of grey approach to the story also follows on to the art style, the first few episodes take place mostly at night giving an almost monochromatic quality to the picture. Best described as gothic, the art style takes a little getting used to — especially the dead eyes of all the characters — but it really does help carry the story. Although the premise of psychic teenagers in the dark future fighting their equally powerful counterparts promises a lot of action, the series contains less that you would think, concerning itself more with the plight of the two children, revealing Enkidu's motives for triggering Twin X and which side is actually good.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 8
EXTRAS: N/A / OVERALL: 8



It's like watching a zeppelin race

Desert Punk VOL 1: ENTER THE DESERT

GENRE: ACTION/COMEDY
PRODUCTION: GONZO

We're obviously huge fans of anime here at Hyper, but there's no escaping the fact that for every *Paranoia Agent* or *Escaflowne*, there's about ten (or twenty) utterly forgettable series'. While *Desert Punk* is okay, it's yet another series that has some potential but isn't going to set the world on fire.

The titular character lives amongst the anthill-like ruins of an old civilisation out in the desert. Apparently it's a harsh place to live, what with the searing heat and poverty, not to mention the roaming gangs and bounty hunters. The *Desert Punk* is a mercenary for hire who prides himself on always finishing every case he's given. Guess we'll have to take his word for it because in the first four episodes he screws up an awful lot. That's fine — this is meant to be an action/comedy series after all, but he's yet another one of those anime characters with an amazing bag of tricks that he can seemingly only use occasionally. He's also one of those characters that are all loud mouthed posturing and no charm, which makes it hard to actually care about



any of the 'scrapes' he gets into. Yes he is a self obsessed money hungry mercenary but still, so was Spike. And then there's the femme fatale, one of the many bounty hunters in the region, and in possession of a set of boobs so large that they seem to negate the need for personality. At least, that's all *Desert Punk* can see.

The first couple of episodes are very very average, both off which feature uninspired 'surprise' plot twists at the end. Fortunately, it starts to get better with the third and fourth episodes, both of which feature some cool action scenes and often slick animation. It really feels like the team starting to find their feet. Fingers crossed it keeps getting better as the series progresses.

Celia Hobart

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 4
EXTRAS: 4 / OVERALL: 6





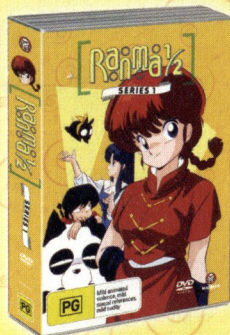
**OUT NOW
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Ranma 1/2

SERIES 1

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Le Portrait de
Nettie Cossette
ゴーストの肖像

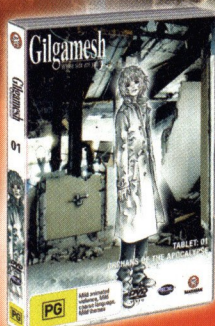
"Cossette puts the creep back in creepy."
-Anime Insider

A Tale of Devotion,
Obsession and a
Tragic Secret



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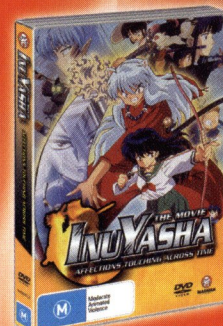
Gilgamesh
Whose side are you on?



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espionage combine
in this super-powered
gothic drama.

INU YASHA
AFFECTIONS TOUCHING ACROSS TIME



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Win FINAL FANTASY VII: ADVENT CHILDREN and UNDERWORLD EVOLUTION on DVD!

>> Our infatuation for Kate Beckinsale is well chronicled, so we won't go into it again in great detail here. She is hot though, and if you take the "Vamp Willow Effect" into account (whereby women playing vampires automatically get hotter) it stands to reason that Underworld Evolution features Kate Beckinsale at her very peak. Reason enough to see it we reckon, although the moody gothic setting and kickass action don't hurt either. Thanks to our friends at Sony Pictures we have ten copies of the DVD, plus ten T-shirts and beanies to give away.

It gets better though, as each winner will also score a copy of the highly anticipated FFXIII: Advent Children on DVD too! As you all know this is one of the most stunning all-CG films ever made, and chronicles what happens to Cloud, Tifa and Barret two years after the events of the game. To be in the running all you have to do is answer this simple question:

 Name the villain in FFXIII on PSOne.

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



Win the RED DWARF DVD Collection!

>> The British have churned out more than their share of classic sitcoms over the years, and we'd rank Red Dwarf up there among the best of them. The setting is the intergalactic mining vessel Red Dwarf, millions of years after a radiation leak wiped out all the humans aboard... except for one, the chicken soup machine repairman Lister, who's brought out of cryo stasis to find himself in an empty ship. Empty, that is, aside from a cat-human hybrid, a holographic representation of one of the most annoying crew members, Kryten the robot and the ship's computer. It's a great satire of sci-fi conventions, while also boasting some truly inspired episodes — Backwards and Back to Reality being two Hyper favourites.

To celebrate the release of Season 8 on DVD, our friends at Roadshow have given us the entire collection of Red Dwarf on DVD for one lucky first prize winner, as well as Season 8 on DVD for five runners up. To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

 What does Rimmer have on his forehead?

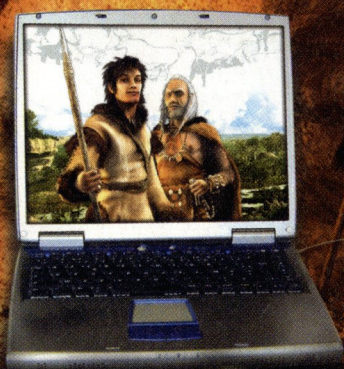
Send your answer and your name and address to: **Smegheads, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to hypercomps@next.com.au with the comp name in the subject line.



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 25 and entries close at 6pm June 14. Only one entry per person please. 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 June 15 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 August issue of Hyper on sale July 5. 9) 10 winners will each receive Underworld Evolution on DVD, an Underworld Evolution T-shirt and an Underworld Evolution beanie (RRP for the pack is \$90), as well as a copy of Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children on DVD (RRP \$39.95). 1 winner will receive seasons 1-8 of Red Dwarf on DVD (RRP approx \$285) and five runners up will receive season 8 of Red Dwarf on DVD (RRP \$50). Total value of competitions is approx \$1835. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

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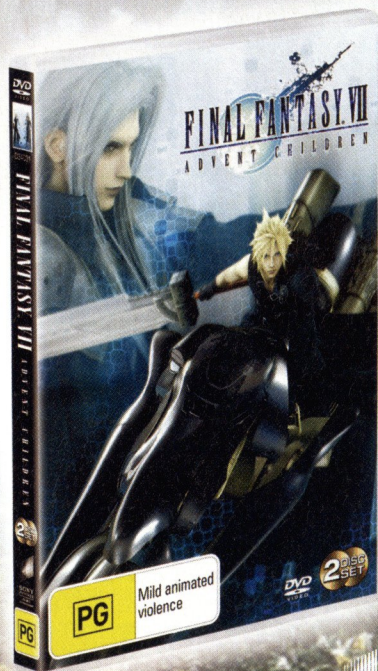
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FINAL FANTASY VII

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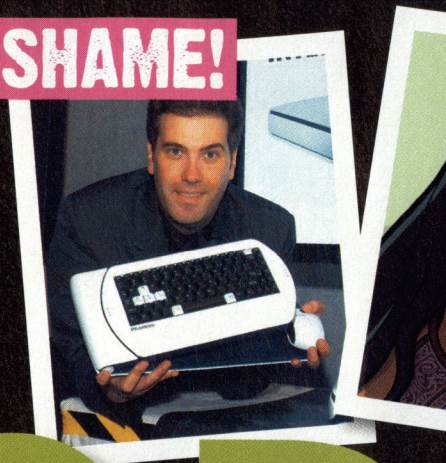
Mild animated
violence

BOLD - F442 HYPER "PlayStation" is a registered trademark and "PSP" and "UMD" are trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. © 2005 Square Enix Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Character design: Tetsuya Nomura © 2006 Layout and Design Sony Pictures Home Entertainment Australia. All Rights Reserved.

Alexander James Burke's

'BITTER MEMOR

SHAME!



Shame is a curious experience. According to your friendly neighbourhood shrink, it's one of the first emotions an infant feels when mistreated. It's a powerful force that tends to wear us down and make us feel unworthy. Gamers know this very well — we feel ashamed on a daily basis. Why? Well, there's the whole "Get a life, you filthy maggot-masturbator" thing; we'll never forget the "Do you play games? Have you killed someone? No? Soon, then?" attitude, and, of course, there's The Getaway: Black Monday. Wherever we go, with whomever we speak, and no matter how many ritual sacrifices we offer in the name of Cthulu, there's always something to blush about in our industry. We ain't proud of the ten terribles listed here, but at least we'll know never to make the same mistakes again.

ACCLAIM SEES DEAD PEOPLE('S NET VALUE)

Acclaim is a company known for some great titles (Mortal Kombat) and some not-so-good ones (BMX XXX). These days, you'll probably only remember the bad ones, because, frankly, there's been little else. And now that the publisher's kaput (kinda — the name has recently been resurrected and the new owners are planning on releasing a free-play MMO), it doesn't look like that image is going to shake off anytime soon. Sadly, that's not the only blemish on Acclaim's reputation: they're also hugely recognised for some of the worst marketing campaigns known to bipedal mammals.

The worst example undoubtedly involves dead people. Now, I know marketing drones — sorry, employees — aren't usually the brightest crayons in the colouring box, but Acclaim's pushers went a little too far with the reasonably forgettable Shadowman 2: The Second Coming. What did they do? Well, they set up a deal: if you're poor and stupid, then why not let them pay for your loved one's gravestone? All you needed to do was allow

Acclaim to advertise Shadowman 2 on it! Those billboards were discreet, honest!

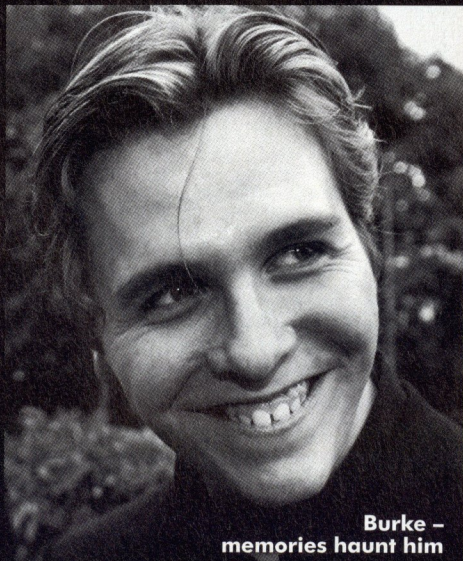
It didn't stop there, however. In the lead up to the release of Turok: Evolution Acclaim declared that the first five people in the UK who legally changed their name to 'Turok' for a year would get cash, a console and a heap of games. What a deal! The US promotion, on the other hand, offered prospective parents a US \$10,000 savings account for having the first baby born on September 1st 2002 (the game's release day). The catch, of

course, was that they had to call it 'Turok'. Only for a year mind you. Much more insidious however, was the genius campaign to promote Burnout 2, whereby Acclaim would pay for any speeding tickets on a certain day. The frontiers of bad taste have advanced many a time in videogaming's short history, but rarely have they ever gone this far.

SHOCK!



(left) Graves — shouldn't be used for advertising



Burke — memories haunt him



IES'

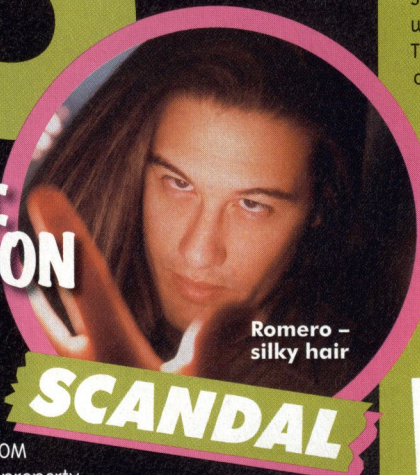
ION STORM: PRODIGAL SON

Believe me, reader: there was a time when the name "John Romero" was marketable. Very marketable, in fact. Having just severed his id Software umbilical cord — with prestigious titles like DOOM and Quake behind him — he was hot property. (Many have referred to him as the gaming industry's first — and only — rock star.) And he knew what to do with it: since he was fed up with technology dictating the development of games, he set out to build a company where "Design Is Law", otherwise known as Ion Storm. Eidos liked the idea, and signed a thirteen million dollar contract with them. Not bad, given that Ion had yet to release a single game.

So where did the money go? Some of it went to the depressingly generic Dominion. The rest? Well, there was the private movie theater, the marble floors, arcade games, \$1500 chairs, showers, and

much, much more. It was also atop the Chase Texas Tower, which, if you're Texan — and you're probably not — you'll know is one of the most exclusive and coveted business areas in Dallas. Romero probably thought that if you spent like a success, you'd be one. Which is why it was a shame Daikatana was crap, no one bought Anachronox, and no one remembers Dominion. In 2001, when Eidos saw the pickles and boo-boos in its investment, it shut down Ion Storm Dallas.

(As a curious side-note, the much more low-fi Ion Storm Austin office — where Warren Spector worked — turned out some fantastic games, one of which was one of the best action-RPGs ever made.)



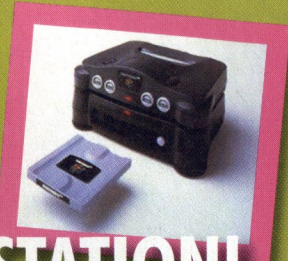
Romero — silky hair

SCANDAL



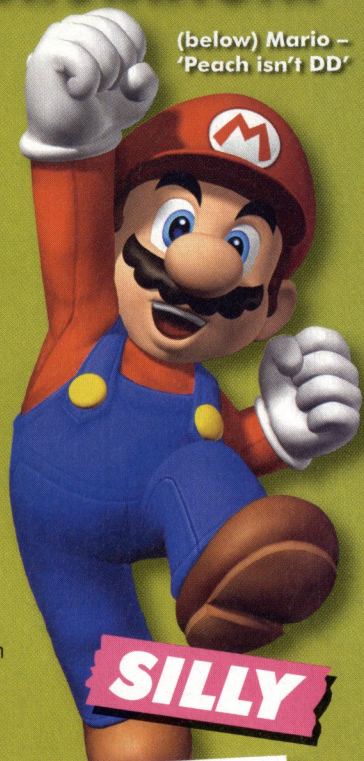
64DD

WATCH OUT PLAYSTATION!



There's no real need to go into Nintendo's silliness in making the Nintendo 64 cartridge-based. It's been done to brutal, agonising death. I loved my N64, anyway. No, what really needs coverage here is the unashamedly feeble attempt made to correct their mistake: you may know it as the 64DD, or "64 Dynamic Disc".

The skinny? Nintendo, having worked out that a 64MB cartridge didn't really hold up against the PlayStation's 650MB capacity CD format, decided to slap together an add-on to their existing console. Problems? For one, it was bigger than the actual parent unit. Secondly, the new media still didn't hold up to the PlayStation's storage power. Thirdly, the technology — which wasn't crash-hot in 1995, when the 64DD was announced — was severely outdated by its release in 1999. Ninty realised that the piece wouldn't sell too well — and that retailers wouldn't want to stock the gargantuan thing — so it shortly withdrew support. Not to worry, though — many of the games that were going to appear on the 64DD ended up on the GameCube.



(below) Mario — 'Peach isn't DD'

SILLY

THE GHOST WHO WALKS

Never has a console been more aptly named than Infinium Labs' "The Phantom". Bamfing in and out of existence, confusing and amusing press and gamers alike, the "revolutionary" Phantom's had a difficult ride since its announcement in 2003. It's sad, too, since the little machine actually sounded quite interesting. Why? Well, rather than using removable media, players will download games onto The Phantom's hard drive using Infinium Labs' subscription service. Sure beats flipping CDs like a ninja on Kate Moss' stash of cocaine, right?

It all sounded pretty swish, but there was one problem: in amongst Infinium's ZOMG! press releases, there was nothing in the way of system specs. Despite reading through quite a lengthy introduction to what we could expect from The Phantom, most people soon realised they still knew sweet nothing about the machine at all. Then there was the HardOCP story revealing that Infinium's "lab" was a nonexistent space in a strip mall, and the very fishy stories from Tim Roberts (CEO) about his other directorial roles. (Many of the companies contacted for the HardOCP story didn't know who Mr. Roberts was.) The Phantom, indeed.

BAMF?



TOO FAT!

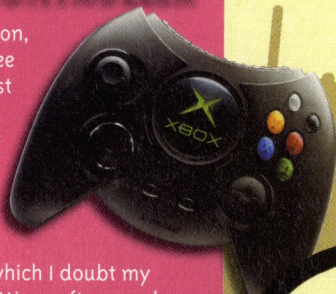
BIG

HANDS, BIG CONTROLLER

As a reasonably tall person, I'm overjoyed when I see something that doesn't just cater to the small fries. Frankly, I'm sick of having my legs crammed up to my chin when in a bus, movie seats that reach up to my lower-back, and scissor-handles into which I doubt my pinky would fit. So, when Microsoft spewed out its Xbox thingamajig in 2001 along with an über-beefy controller, I finally felt loved.

For most other people, it was a bit like making friends with an ogre and playing games on his home unit. The thing was friggin' huge. (It probably didn't do wonders for their self-esteem, either.) Considering how much time and money was undoubtedly spent doing market research for this controller, we hope Microsoft learnt a lesson about the pitfalls of design by focus group.

It wasn't just the size of the thing either — the D-pad was entirely useless and the less said about the cramped and terribly positioned face buttons the better. In fact, up against Sony's sleek DualShock hand-warmer, Microsoft's controller looked a bit like that obese, manic-depressive cousin no one in the family talks about. Luckily, that cousin finally ditched Krispy Kreme, got himself a therapist, and before long, a new Xbox controller was on the market.



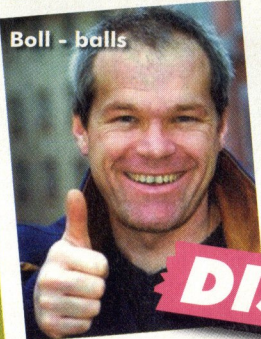
BOLLIFICATION

To gamers, Uwe Boll has become a disease.

Admittedly, what he does for a living isn't anything new — games and movies have dripped like festering pus into each other for years, and almost always with bad results — but Boll just won't take it lying down. Despite his movies being almost universally panned by critics and audiences alike, Boll's got a startling five new videogame-based movies in development. (Hunter: The Reckoning, Fear Effect, Postal, Far Cry, and In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale have all made the cut, if you must know.)

So what does this mean for gamers? Further propaganda "proving" that our favourite pastime is shallow, artless, and vapid.

Boll - balls



DISEASE!

SEXXX!

MOCHA LATTE

Grand Theft Auto is a controversial series. Rockstar is a controversial developer. Consequently, it doesn't take too much cognitive power to work out that GTA: San Andreas was going to make more than a few people a bit angry. Cop cappin', prostitute beatin', and drug dealin' aren't the kind of wholesome activities your average parent-of-two is going to look upon with joy. That said, it sold like water on Mars. In this country, San Andreas was given an MA15+, and was still bought ravenously by happy, well-adjusted folks of all ages.

Then we woke up and smelled the coffee. Patrick Wildenborg, a Dutch modder, released "Hot Coffee" — an

interactive sex game where your beau's "EXCITEMENT" is critical. Interestingly, though, when the politicians took notice, Wildenborg claimed he wasn't the angry masturbator to blame. The credit, he said, went to Rockstar, who had disabled the sex game just before San Andreas' release. He'd merely unlocked it. Rockstar piously denied their involvement. A formal investigation was made into Hot Coffee's genesis. The result? Well, let's just say Rockstar looked a bit silly. The Hot Coffee episode ended up becoming a major wart on the gaming industry's nose, and did nothing to lift the stigma on us gamers as being tragic, lonely-guy porn-fiends.



'DON'T GET TRAPPED HERE!'

IT'S A TRAP!

Gamers and non-gamers will remember Digital Pictures' *Night Trap* — one of the first games featuring live-action footage rather than CGI — for different reasons. The latter will decry it as a prime exercise in perversion — see innocent, nightie-wearing college girls (and

guys without the nighties) raped and killed by spooky vampires in garbage bags and some very smoky, lethal traps. (It probably didn't help the controversy that the game starred sitcom actress-cum-softcore pornstar-cum-suicide, Dana Plato.)

Gamers, on the other hand, will first point out that *Night Trap* featured no graphic violence, nudity, or sex. (The college kids' shenanigans seldom went beyond pillow fights and sing-songs, though the idea of watching them through different cameras is admittedly kinda creepy.) They'll go on to say that the real problem with the game wasn't that it was offensive; it was because it was a terrible piece of software. Pointless,



linear gameplay abounded, and thanks to its undue popularity (as a result of the controversy), many game designers began to ape Digital Pictures' efforts, thus spawning the genre we'd most like to forget, FMV games.



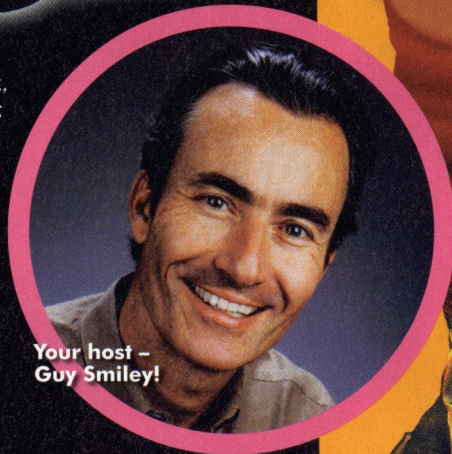
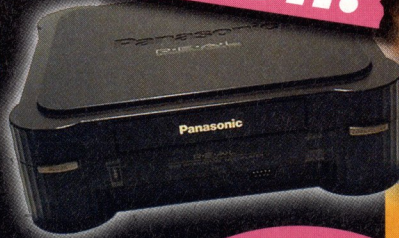
HAWKINS CONSOLE Trip!

Ever heard of that small-time startup that some kooks refer to as "Electronic Arts", the biggest videogame publisher on the planet? Yeah, I hadn't either, but there you go. Anyway, story goes that William "Trip" Hawkins III, EA's founder, decided he was fed up with dishing out the software, and began plans to make his very own console. He set up The 3DO Company in partnership with EA — where he remained Chairman of the Board — Matsushita, MCA, Time Warner, and others. And the juicy fruit of his labours was the 3DO console.

The 3DO had everything going for it, absolutely

massive publicity, cheap royalty prices for developers, no regional lockouts, CD (rather than cartridge) format, and for gamers, the promise of some great original titles. Unfortunately, those titles never came, and, realistically, the only good games the 3DO supported were ports — *StarCon II*, *Myst*, *Out of This World*. The rest? Well, there was *Ballz*, *Rebel Assault*, and, yes, *Night Trap*. When the PlayStation finally hit shelves, the 3DO was doomed. Trip Hawkins' console ended up being a gigantic waste of time, and it remains a constant reminder to us, the gaming press, to be a bit more mindful of that which we shamelessly promote.

3D'OH!



Your host — Guy Smiley!

IF FOREVER NEVER COMES...

In 1996, when 3D Realms' *Duke Nukem 3D* hit stores, the Duke was king. He was absolutely untouchable. (And with *Duke 3D* being the incredibly interactive and immersive shooter it was, why wouldn't he be?) It was around this time that the phrase "Quake-killer" was coined, too. It's not particularly shocking, then, that gamers were salivating and twitching uncontrollably over the prospect of a sequel. And guess what? They're still twitching.

Duke Nukem Forever was announced in 1997, and it was believed that the game would appear around 1998 with a lovely *Quake II* engine finish. It disappeared. 3D Realms declared a switch to the *Unreal* engine in 1998, and then to the *Unreal Tournament* engine in 1999. Two years later, gamers were treated to a sexy trailer at E3. Boy, were we excited — DNF was almost out! Another two years, and even *Take Two*, DNF's publisher, publicly started complaining. George Broussard, DNF's designer, acronously told them to "shut the f**k up."

Three more years, and DNF's still in production. Will it ever make it to our hard drives and living rooms? 3D Realms thinks so. But only "when it's done."

See you in 2016.

Err... LATE!



MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:

78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:

freakscene@next.com.au

WE <3 THIS LETTER

Recently, I turned 19 and as usual, I got money for my birthday. After spending pretty much all of it on text books for uni, I found I had about \$50 left.

Wondering if there were actually any new games out there I could get for my darling PS2, I took a trip to the nearest EB. Of course I thought myself a fool, considering that pretty much every game for the PS2 are over \$50.

However, whilst browsing on the lowest shelf, closest to the ground, something orange caught my eye. I picked it and looked it over- 'We "3 Katamari"... hm, what a strange title. The artwork on the cover looked childish and somehow screamed 'For ages 2 and up!'. I went to put it back, when I saw the price...

\$50. It was a new game, and



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SLITHER - IN CINEMAS MAY 18

suddenly it seemed like it would be a good idea to get because I do seem to get a lot of small children over at my place.

So I bought it and took it home.

And then I played it to see if the kids would like it...

And I'm still playing it...

Oh, to sing the praises of the wonderful game known as 'Katamari'! And the almost-perverse pleasures of rolling a gumball over the bodies of thousands in one go! To hear the screams of pandas, elephants and cows as you crush them in one fell swoop!

Sure, the graphics may be a little boxy, and you get the feeling the makers of the game were on some sort of mushroom when they made it. But! I must honestly say that this is one of the more ingenious games of our time! (Although I still haven't been able to create a Katamari bigger than Moe's chin...)

This, of course is going to lead me off into a rant about other games out there.

Those generic, factory-spewed pieces of crud that are churned out every day of every week! Where, oh, where have all the new ideas gone? It seems like 90% of all games released today were created with a template. 'Grand Theft Auto clones

and dungeon crawlers as far as the eye can see!' in the immortal words of one VG Cats comic. I'm sick of seeing so many GTA-like games flooding the market.

Perhaps all the good ideas have disappeared, or maybe it is because I'm an old fan of Nintendo's innovative game development. However, the problem still stands.

I'm sure Chuck Norris' tears would cure the problem... it's too bad he's never cried.

Raine

Devil Sign.

There is nothing we can add to this. You are about as right as you can get without being us.

GROINY

First of all, I'd just like to say that Hyper #150 rocked my jocks. What caused this particular groinal outburst? The Celebratory-Look-Back-On-All-Of-Our-Issues feature. Casually scanning over the pages, my eyes arrived at #62, December of '98. It was the First Hyper Issue I Ever Bought, long since lost, and just seeing that cover again brought a tear of nostalgic bliss to my eye.

The question is this: is it in any way possible to get a back issue? Aside from raiding some other reader's house brandishing a power drill? I'd love to leaf through it again, and so would my jocks.

On another note, all of you out there who told me I was a fool for approaching Black with cynical caution, suck on this; the game was a near-apocalyptic cock-up. Vocabulary lesson for today, part 1. Repeat after me: "Killzone."

To wrap up, I'd just like to query developer's choice of game music. Now, I'm all for symphonic masterpieces in games like Final Fantasy, but in a brutal action or racing game, it's the last thing I want to hear. We need metal; I mean, what could get you more pumped in an epic war game than say, epic war metal? Such music exists, you know. Or at least something rampage-inducing; Cannibal Corpse, Mayhem, Devourment. Please, guys.

There is a sub-genre of metal called "LOTR Metal." Seriously. Why it has not been used in a single LOTR

game to date mystifies me.

Thanks for your time.

Regards,

Kvlt

So here's the thing. We don't know a thing about LOTR Metal. We've never heard it and we probably never will. And yet we'd still wager that it's crap. Now that I think about it though, it could be pretty rockin'. I mean, what could be more manly and 'metal' than wailing on a guitar in the forest while singing about elves?

Seriously though, it's impossible to please everybody with game soundtracks, but you do have a good point about tone. Whether it's driving techno or war metal there's definitely a time and a place for more aggressive music in certain styles of game, and there's nothing worse than music that just doesn't suit a game. At least on 360 you can play to your own music any time you want. And the other systems? Just turn the in-game music off and crank the stereo. It's probably the only way you're going to hear the likes of Carcass or Napalm Death in a game.

As to your first question, Ebay is probably your best bet to get back issues as our 'archives' consist of a dungeon-like room infested with God knows what and knee deep in ancient magazines - the vast majority of them not Hyper. If only we'd held onto more back issues. We'd be rich biatch!

SHORT BUS

hey chumps, i'd say how gr8 ur mag is but u hear it in every letter, and it'd get pretty old, like how my gf keeps sayin "i love u" in an effort to make me say it back so she can pop out babys and live off welfare... im on to her...as i am on to u...!!!

*shifty eye movments directed in the hyperdirection*plus ive written in b4 sayin how ive brought every issue blah blah, and ass kissin hasnt gotten me nowhere, so thats it, no soup for u. onto my major "i hate you so much michel j fox why wont u just die already" bitch for this week. Black. the game that could of been.. nay SHOULD hav been....and most probably i suspect my gripe is also with EA big wigs and fat cats as managment types could be the only i's mongolised enuf to change this

CAPTION THIS!

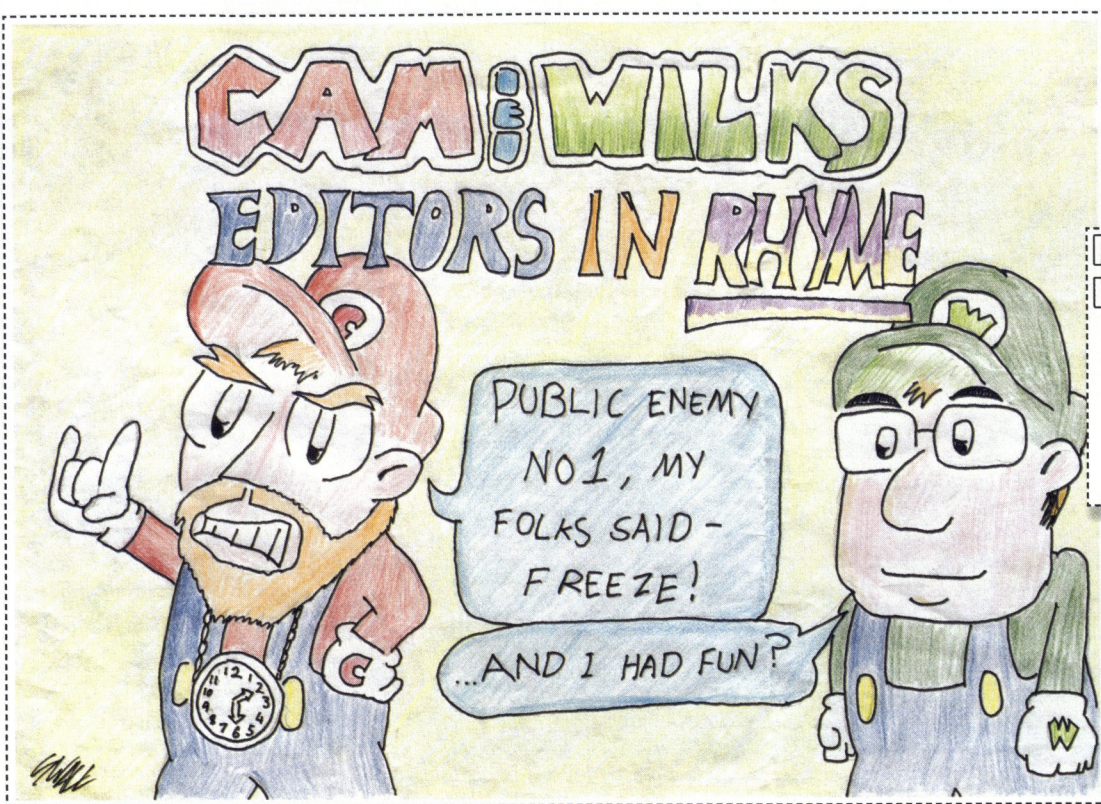
Mark Filpo floated up through the Wookiee prOn captions to become this month's CAPTIONING CHAMPION! Nice work with the ellipsis too...



The rebels were shocked to discover Leia smuggling GameCube games to Alderaan...

MARIO & LUIGI: PARTNERS IN TIME artwork competition winners

Thanks to everyone that entered and congratulations to the winners.



Mario: Pimpin'



[up] Nathan Crick draws with his massive pimp hand

[left] Simon Wall thinks Cam is a ginger Flavor Flav

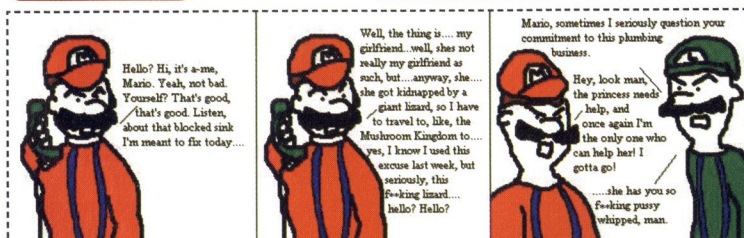
[below] Ricki Carroll has got to be related to Lewis. Genius!

[below] Mark Withington should be RC for this

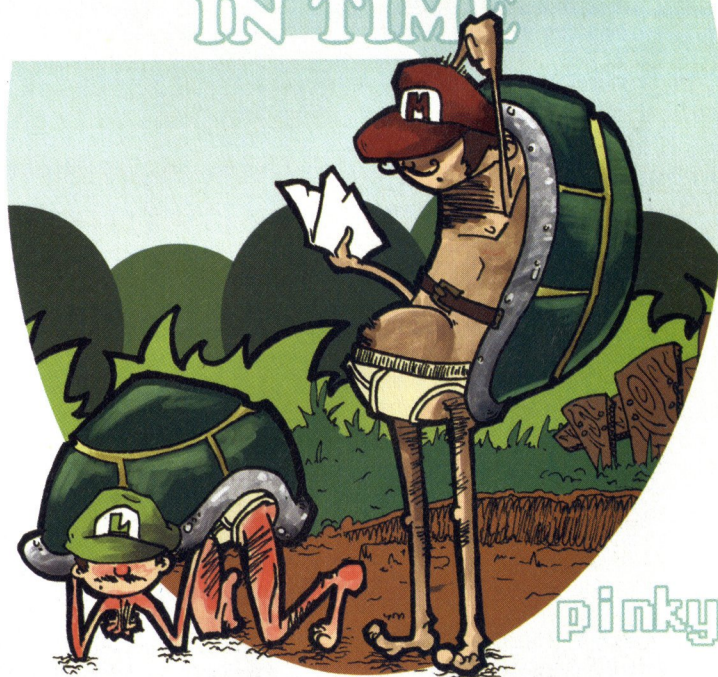


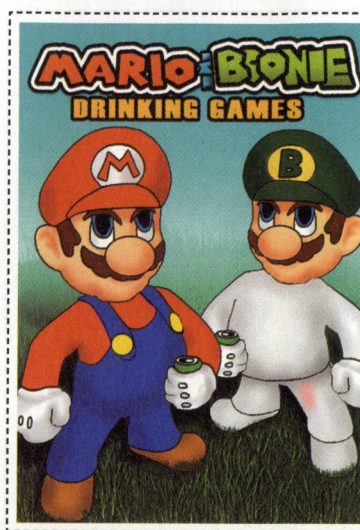
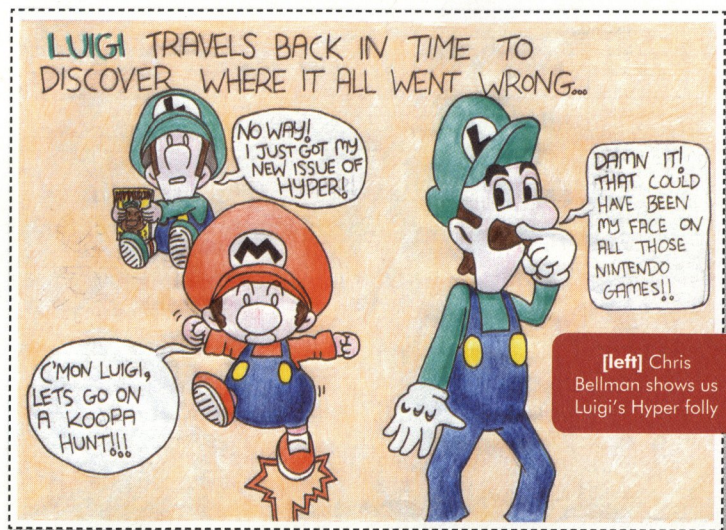
[below] Yet another awesome Jickle effort

[right] Josh A busted this B&W masterpiece



MARIO & LUIGI LOST AND NAKED IN TIME





MARIO & LUIGI: PARTNERS IN TIME runners-up

Two more entries that just had to be printed!

[left] Russell Clark. Legend. Legend. Dead set legend. Top bloke, etc.

game from sumfn that was gonna rock my jocks to the patheticness that is Black, almost as pathetic as white ppl pretending to be pimped out homie G's.... "wat up? i'll tell u wat up!! ur a tool"

i waited with gr8 anticipation for this game, finally a game to do away wif boring story, cheesy characters and the old, been there done that, of most other fps. i mean dun get me wrong, im an rpg nut so i love a good story....a GOOD story, not a pair of chins talking wif voices like that wank from bright ideas that has throat cancer, and if he doesnt i hope he does because i hate every, especially him. from all this game promised to be, to the mediocr "i'll forget ur name after i wake up and run out before u do" game that it is....wtf hapened?!?! i wont list most of the probs i had wif this game cause u guys pretty much nailed it in ur review, the only ones that didnt drop the ball on this i was the art dept, i mean, this game is i hot babe...pitty bout the personality like a door-stop.

and i just have to say... since EAs take over of Criterion ive been at best, a lil disappointed. i mean, not only Black has earnt my disdain, but since the awsonness that was burnout2, the rest in the series has been good....but not gr8. i mean hear me out, in the burnout2 days it was racing, not destruction durby on a track, sure, i hired 3 and 4 and said "wow that was kool" but it was never like burnout2, u might be saying "der u hot stud, u couldnt do takedowns in burnout 2" well u could, it just required cunning, skill and white knuckle nerves of steel. example, having a narrow lead on ur mate, catching a glimps of a huge truck coming ur way. u slow down jus a bit so he's on ur ass and cant see for wen u go up this hill, as u know, u'll c the truck before he does and hes to busy being a jerk raming u. u c the truck....!!! u hold jus long enuf until there is only jus time for u to steer

clear of this jugernaut, ur friend sees u swerve drastically to ur side and by then, its too late the trucks so close theres no time to scream "i'll get u for this beth midler!!!", hes cat food buddy.

and he screams and swears at u and u laugh ur ass off all the way to the finish line...thats a damn takedown. **[We'll cut you off there dude. We only have 100 pages to work with.]**

Usually we would have a non-person specific response to letters but we thought we'd let Wilks field this one.

Wilks: Dude, I may hate a lot of stuff but let me tell you something about vitriol - if you want it to come across as anything other than the semi-coherent mewlings of a short bus rider you need to learn how to spell and punctuate. That aside, you have a few points that I could translate. Yes Criterion screwed up with Black. And yeah, we hear your point on the Burnout series. It's definitely less 'pure' now, and in some ways less fun. But that can hardly be blamed on EA - Criterion had to keep the series moving and that's the direction they chose.

THE RIGHT OPINION

I'm writing to you because i feel that all systems (being either consoles or handhelds) should all be treated as a equal. while this never will happen, and everyone is allowed to have their own opinion, i just feel that each system has its own strength.

While the DS has a touch screen, allowing for very unique games, the PSP is the closest thing to a portable PS2 you can get, while also thriving on its multimedia functions.

The Consoles works in a similar way, i mean, whether current gen or next gen, they all have different strengths. In my opinion, bashing up on a certain company, or system, gets you no-where, except missing out on some great games, yes i own

a GCN and a PS2, but not a Xbox simply because im 16, broke, and looking for a job so instead the 360 would be better naturally.

I just consider owning all consoles (i understand some ppl cannot because of money issues, but anyway) is the way to go, you get the most out of gaming. I myself hope to own all of the next-gen consoles.

Anyway, that's just my thoughts, what do you think? i just consider all systems to be equal is all, thanks for reading, later!,

Daniel.

PS. i understand why people play like to play games on a HDTV. but i also did read somewhere that the next gen consoles mainly require this, because of normal tv's displaying it way to dark or something. anyway, i myself owning a normal TV, would the 360 (being the only next-gen console out) look decent on a normal TV? thanks.

What's this? We read your email and found no reference to Micro\$oft \$ony or ZOMGNINTENDORZ IS RoXoRZ!!!!!! Thank you. A person after our own hearts. All consoles have their merits. They all have their weaknesses. All of them are good. As to the HDTV question, the games shouldn't look too dark on your standard def TV but they will only look like a small upgrade from Xbox as the games need the higher resolutions to really shine.

GODWIN'S LAW

Hey hyper, congrats on your continued success...

One thing I couldn't help but notice was the ever increasing retardedness of the gaming industry and your latest mag has just confirmed the worst which is that the powers to be are power hungry nazi totalitarian tossers.

How can they possibly justify a price rise in merchandise when we

already pay more than most other gaming regions in the world?

We were at one time paying up to \$100 for playstation one games, many would see that as proof that it's time there was a price rise, i see it as proof that we've been getting fleeced for years.

If they seriously want the extra cash flowing in, why don't they make the yanks pay the same equivalent to what we do already?

To make matters worse, they want us to pay full price for games and take away all rights we have to sell or buy second hand preplayed games.

I was under the impression that if you buy something, it's supposed to be yours to do whatever you want with it but i'm afraid that the antics of the music industry might start to apply to the gaming industry.

Think about it, you buy a cd or dvd but even though it's supposed to be yours, you can't copy it or give it away over a P2P network and many of them already state in the copyright disclaimer that it can't be resold either.

Is this what's going to become of the gamers as well, hunted down as criminals whenever they buy or sell preowned games?

Dude, reselling games, music and DVDs has always been a grey area legally. As illogical as it may sound, owning something does not mean you can copy, distribute, screen, resell - none of that. At any rate, the only country that really pays less than us for games is the US. Europe, the region we are considered to be part of pays equivalent prices for games and some countries pay more. It will be interesting to see what happens to game prices when the PS3 arrives. Unless prices are comparable across countries you could just import the US version of the game. It could have a big impact on release dates too. Fingers crossed..

The Passion of the Gamer

THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT GAMER

By Dylan Burns

Being informed that I'm the average age for an Australian gamer (see Hyper issue 147) was at once both consoling and worrying. You see, now every year that passes, every hour, each nanosecond, leaves my average-ness behind like a silent-but-deadly rectal zephyr in a supermarket aisle. And much like said expulsion, my future becomes a downhill slide into the dreaded late twenties and (shudder) beyond.

Already, the effects of my elder gamer status are being felt. Gone are the days of endless gaming hours; instead I must herald the dawn of my RSI days, where finger shaking and complaining of stiff body parts are par for the course. Gone too are the carefree teenage hours spent of an evening clocking SNES titles for the zillionth time, with nary a care for social constructions like income, taxes, or worse, Centrelink.

No longer will I taste the sweet fruits of popping my hard-filched coins into the latest arcade machine, perfecting Sub-Zero's spine-wrenching Fatality. Now I am relegated to the social class of reminiscent gamer, forced to exist alongside moustache-growing-plays-card-based-games-with-kids guy and creepy-looking-dresses-in-retro-shirts-and-jeans guy (apologies to anyone fitting these descriptions). Perhaps my only solace is that in our social outcast's corner there are no grey haired relics espousing that in their day a piece of wood and a hoop was all the entertainment they needed.

And it's not like I can just ignore my imminent demise toward old gamer status, everywhere I go I'm confronted with the upcoming generation of gamers. Let's call them Generation New Gamer, or GNG. For the days of GNG are definitely upon us, they flock to the computer section of every department store like moths to bright lights. Blinded by the endless profusion of game titles, they are a generation of quick fixes and misinformation. "Oh yeah, this looks awesome," one may say whilst holding what I know to be the most puerile title ever to grace the shelves of my local games shop. "Yeah cool, I'll get mum to buy it," he decides, and so the ever-repeating cycle of shit games is reinforced, fueled by beleaguered mothers the world over. I want to smash them over the head with the title and scream, "Don't you know that you're being sucked in? Read a few reviews first, hire it out, just don't be fooled by glossy images and useless back cover blurbs". But therein lies my cynical aged gamer side, the very characteristic that makes me feel the first tentative tugs of my inevitable slide into gaming retirement.

Once I become aware of them, GNGs suddenly seem ubiquitous, appearing everywhere, conglomerating in large, roaming groups. You can first hear their high pitched giggling, beyond the range of mine old ears to hear but eventually audible just before I catch sight of them. My irises contract, my heart skips a beat, pounding in my ears as I become all too aware that I am alone and not fit to handle a group of them. There's always a leader, often red haired and freckly. Closely guarding him are two or three chubby lads - mean to look at but soft as cream cheese once you scare them good... Then the source of the giggling appears: pre-teenage girls, replete

with pink mobile phones hanging from even pinker nylon straps around their necks. They're the worst, the type that vote via SMS for every single TV and radio popularity contest.

They enter the gaming section, nonchalantly pushing past trolleys, prams and a few shambling old gamers such as myself. I know I should try and rally those outnumbered desultory relics to my cause. Instead I attempt to ignore the GNGs, even though the helium-pitched squeaks, clicks and squeals that pass for their communication pierce my aural nerves like hot needles. I try to ignore the fact that they make straight for the crappiest titles in existence, and that Freckly seems intent on purchasing it with the seventeen weeks of pocket money he's saved up. The yawning abyss between myself and these GNGs is immense - surely I was never

so naïve, never so damn annoying. And then in a moment of self-realisation I am thrown into the depths of anxiety as I realise that I must have been.

Perhaps technology has changed, but instead of mobile phones we had the yo-yo and I distinctly remember a roller blade period. Indeed, I realise that my distaste for these kids actually stems from my own yearning to return to my young gaming days and I am left feeling ancient and forgotten as they whip around me like an angry wind.

All thoughts of purchasing a game are forgotten as I wonder if buying it would in fact be a desperate attempt at buying back my youth. But then one thought keeps me holding on to the precipice of sanity: I am no expert in statistics, but it may just be possible, given that I am the average age for a gamer, that as I grow older then so too will my comrade gamers - my brothers in play - thus pushing the average gaming age along with us. If so, then I can expect to nestle into the comforting arms of being an average gamer for a good while to come.

Of course, there will always be GNGs, but without them and their misguided appetites from whence shall the next generation of competent gamers arise? And as they move into the position that my brethren and I currently occupy, we shall in turn move on to the twilight years of gaming goodness, safe in the knowledge that we carried the median with us as far as long as we possibly could.

Such thoughts calm my anxiety. Whether or not my mathematics is sound, I am content to swallow the placebo if it gives me peace. My Scrooge-like demeanour is at once lightened, and all animosity towards Generation New Gamer is repealed, letting me see them for the harmless, putrid creatures that they are.

This newfound vitality even lets me ward off RSI and ignore stiff joints. My body may age, but my mind will always be willing. Trends will come and go, and when the smoke clears I shall be left standing tall, a stalwart for the average gamer, a guiding beacon to those lost in the sea of uncertainty. Fear not fellow average gamers, for we may age, but you're only as old as the game you play makes you feel.

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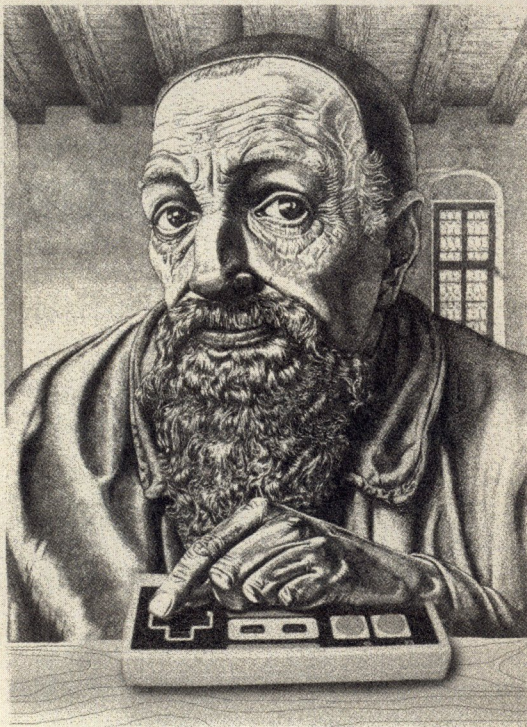


FIG 1. "You think YOU'RE old..." - Malcolm

The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP
10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$50

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | ◆ | V8 Supercars 3 | Racing |
| 2 | ▲ | The Godfather | Action |
| 3 | ▼ | Black | Action |
| 4 | ★ | Driver Parallel Lines SE | Racing |
| 5 | ▼ | NFS: Most Wanted | Racing |
| 6 | ▲ | 24 The Game | Adventure |
| 7 | ★ | King Kong | Adventure |
| 8 | ▼ | Buzz: The Music Quiz Bundle | Family |
| 9 | ▼ | WWE Smackdown vs Raw 06 Sports | |
| 10 | ★ | Eyeto: Play 3 Pack | Compilation |

TOP
10

Nintendo DS Games Over \$40

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Nintendogs Dachshund | Simulator |
| 2 | ◆ | Nintendogs Lab & Friends | Simulator |
| 3 | ◆ | Nintendogs Chihuahua | Simulator |
| 4 | ◆ | Mario Kart | Racing |
| 5 | ▲ | Hasbro 4 Game Fun Pack | Family |
| 6 | ▲ | Animal Crossing Wild World | Strategy |
| 7 | ▼ | Super Mario 64 | Adventure |
| 8 | ▼ | Mario & Luigi Partners Time | Adventure |
| 9 | ★ | Super Princess Peach | Action |
| 10 | ★ | Worms Open Warfare | Action |

TOP
10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Pokémon XD: Gale Darkness | RPG |
| 2 | ▲ | NFS: Most Wanted | Racing |
| 3 | ▲ | Sonic Riders | Racing |
| 4 | ▲ | Shadow The Hedgehog | Adventure |
| 5 | ▼ | Mario Party 6 | Family |
| 6 | ★ | Mario Smash Football | Sports |
| 7 | ★ | Legend Zelda: 4 Swords Adv | RPG |
| 8 | ★ | Starfox Assault | Adventure |
| 9 | ▼ | Mario Super Star Baseball | Sports |
| 10 | ▼ | Metroid Prime 2: Echoes | Adventure |

TOP
10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ▲ | V8 Supercars 3 | Racing |
| 2 | ▼ | Black | Action |
| 3 | ▲ | The Godfather | Action |
| 4 | ▼ | Halo 2 | Action |
| 5 | ★ | King Kong | Adventure |
| 6 | ▲ | NFS: Most Wanted | Racing |
| 7 | ▼ | Star Wars Battlefront II | Action |
| 8 | ▲ | Rugby 2006 | Sports |
| 9 | ▲ | Ghost Recon 3 Advanced | Action |
| 10 | ▼ | The Sims 2 | Strategy |

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion | RPG |
| 2 | ◆ | The Sims 2: Open Business | Strategy |
| 3 | ◆ | World Of WarCraft | RPG |
| 4 | ▲ | The Sims Deluxe | Strategy |
| 5 | ▼ | LOTR Battle Middle Earth 2 | Strategy |
| 6 | ▲ | Age Of Empires III | Strategy |
| 7 | ▼ | The Sims 2: Nightlife | Strategy |
| 8 | ▲ | Star Wars: Empire At War | Strategy |
| 9 | ★ | The Godfather | Action |
| 10 | ★ | Call Of Duty 2 | Action |

TOP
10

Xbox 360 Games Over \$50

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | ▲ | Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion | RPG |
| 2 | ▼ | Call Of Duty 2 | Action |
| 3 | ▼ | Ghost Recon 3 Advanced | Action |
| 4 | ▼ | Project Gotham Racing 3 | Racing |
| 5 | ◆ | Perfect Dark Zero | Action |
| 6 | ▲ | NFS: Most Wanted | Racing |
| 7 | ▼ | Fight Night Round 3 | Sports |
| 8 | ▲ | Tony Hawk USA Waste+Gun | Compilation |
| 9 | ▼ | Quake 4 | Action |
| 10 | ◆ | VIP Premiere Pack | Action |

TOP
10

All Format Games Over \$50

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | ★ | V8 Supercars 3 | PlayStation 2 |
| 2 | ▲ | Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion | Xbox 360 |
| 3 | ▲ | Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion | PC/MAC |
| 4 | ▼ | Call Of Duty 2 | Xbox 360 |
| 5 | ★ | The Sims 2: Open Business | PC/MAC |
| 6 | ▼ | Ghost Recon 3 Advanced | Xbox 360 |
| 7 | ▼ | Project Gotham Racing 3 | Xbox 360 |
| 8 | ★ | The Godfather | PlayStation 2 |
| 9 | ★ | Black | PlayStation 2 |
| 10 | ▼ | Perfect Dark Zero | Xbox 360 |

TOP
10

PlayStation Portable Games Over \$40

W/E 2nd April 2006
RETAIL SALES

- | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | GTA: Liberty Cities | Adventure |
| 2 | ★ | MX Vs ATV Unleashed Edge | Racing |
| 3 | ◆ | NFS: Most Wanted | Racing |
| 4 | ▼ | Lemmings | Strategy |
| 5 | ◆ | WWE Smackdown vs Raw 06 Sports | |
| 6 | ◆ | Star Wars Battlefront II | Action |
| 7 | ★ | Namco Museum Battle Ctn | Action |
| 8 | ▼ | Street Fighter Alpha Max | Action |
| 9 | ★ | Midway Arcade Treasures | Action |
| 10 | ▼ | The Sims 2 | Strategy |

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



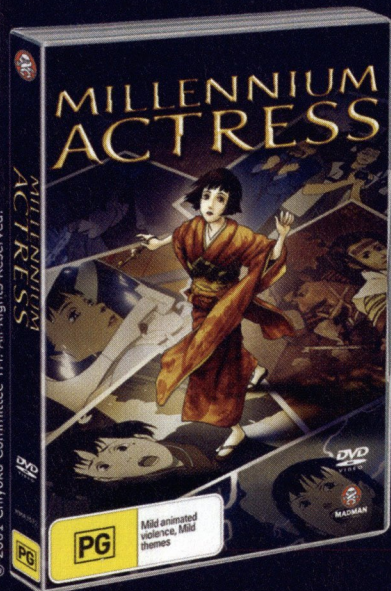
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MILLENNIUM ACTRESS

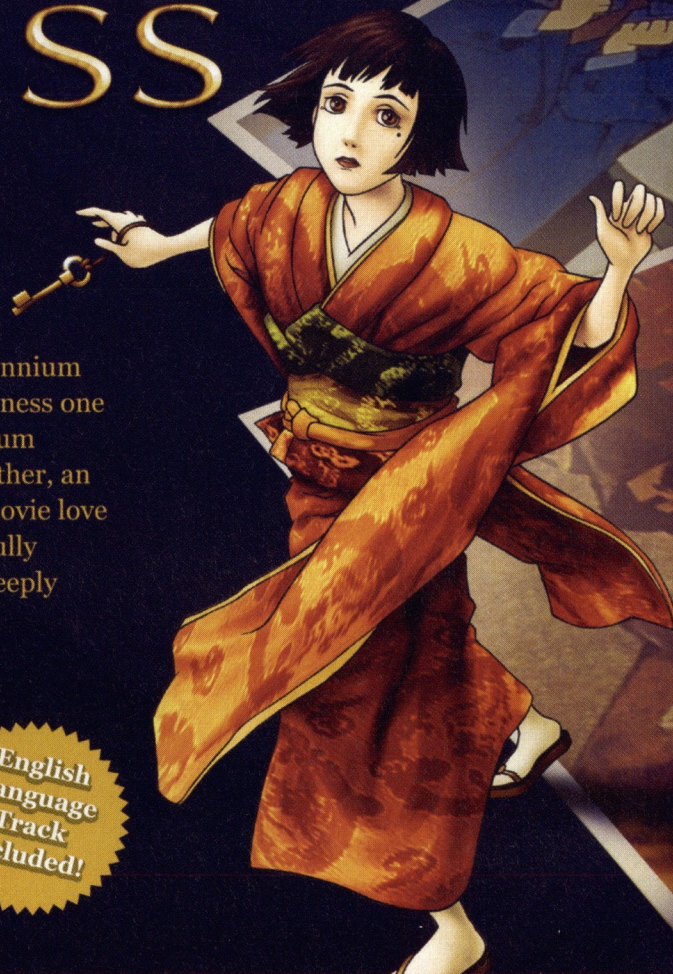
FROM SATOSHI KON,
DIRECTOR OF PERFECT BLUE



"To watch Millennium Actress is to witness one cinematic medium celebrating another, an expression of movie love that is wonderfully eccentric and deeply affecting."

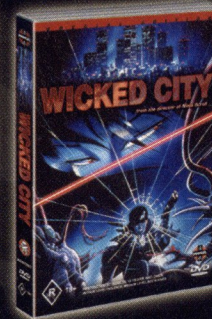
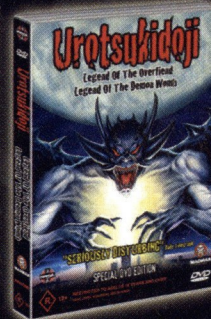
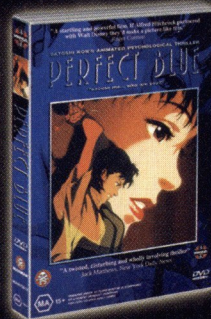
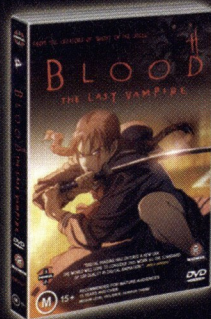
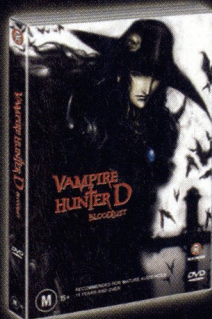
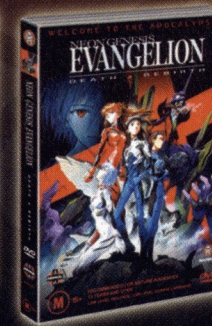
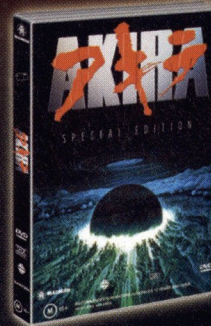
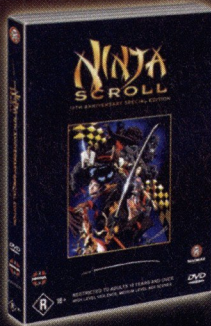
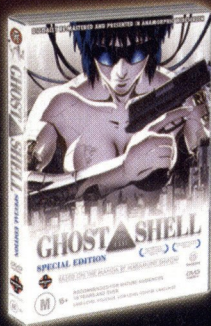
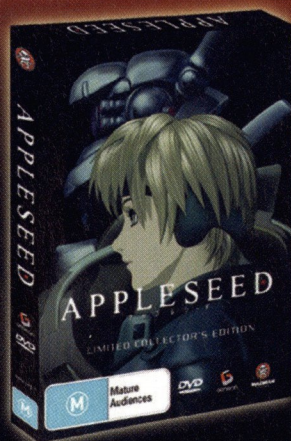
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Next Issue:

Can SEGA regain their status as one of the most cutting edge developers out there? We travel to SEGA Japan to find out...

PLUS: E3 2006 Part 1- all the news and hottest games, Download to Papa – a look at digital distribution, and reviews of Metal Gear Ac!d 2, Hitman: Blood Money, Tourist Trophy, Odama, Table Tennis and New Super Mario Bros.

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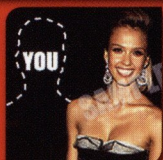
You will receive an SMS with a link to a menu where you can select from hundreds of celebrities, and it tells you how to send us your PIC. If you are unsure, refer to your manual or contact your operator.

NOTE: Due to order volumes and picture personalisation, please allow up to 24 hours for your processed pic.

CURRENT TOP CELEBRITY PICS



BEYONCE



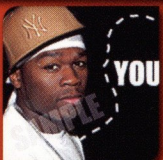
JESSICA ALBA



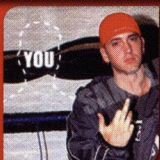
CAMERON DIAZ



CHARLOTTE CHURCH



50 CENT



EMINEM



JORDAN



PARIS HILTON



ANGELINA JOLIE



JESSIE SIMPSON



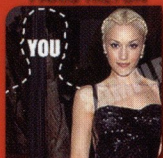
ANNA KORNIKOVA



CARMEN ELECTRA



PAMELA ANDERSON



GWEN STEFANI



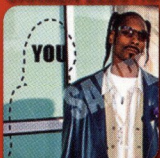
EVA LONGORIA



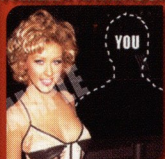
ABI TITMUS



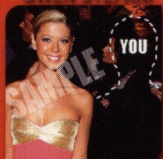
SARAH M GELLAR



SNOOP DOG



CHRISTINA AGUILERA



TARA RIED



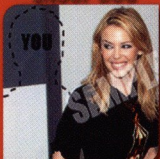
NATALIE PORTMAN



UMA THURMAN



ALYSON HANNIGAN



KYLIE

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NOW**

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- Secure (No user ID displayed)
- Can block others or Quit anytime
- Only OZ Text dating service that matches your profile!

Men text "HYPERGAL"

Women text "HYPERGUY" to

Gay text "HYPERGAY"

**199 2DATE
(199 23283)**

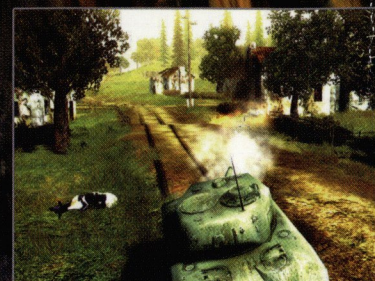
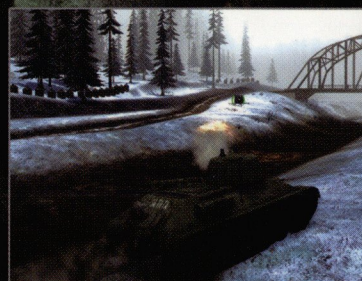
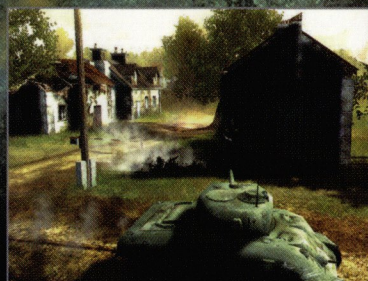
TERMS: YOU MUST BE OVER 16 YRS OF AGE. 199 CELEB: YOUR MOBILE MUST BE WAP ENABLED & MMS COMPATIBLE. WORKS WITH TELSTRA, OPTUS & VODAFONE. NOT COMPATIBLE WITH CDMA MOBILES. EACH CELEB PHOTO PROCESSED COSTS \$8.50 (BILLED \$5 ON ORDER & \$3.50 ON DELIVERY OF CELEB PIC). STANDARD MMS SMS & WAP CHARGES APPLY. 199 2DATE: WORKS WITH TELSTRA, VODAFONE, OPTUS, VIRGIN & "3". FIRST 3 MATCHES SENT \$7 - INCLUDES REGISTRATION & FIRST MATCH FREE. (VIRGIN USERS WILL RECEIVE 1 MATCH CHARGED AT \$3.50). FURTHER SMS CHARGED AT \$3.50 PER MESSAGE RCVD. (avge as little as 70C/TEXT). TEXT "MORE" FOR EXTRA MATCHES. TEXT "STOP" TO QUIT. STD SMS CHARGES APPLY. SUPPORT: help@celebritymobile.com.au TEL: 1300 737421
TERMS: www.celebritymobile.com.au. WE MAY SEND FREE PROMOTIONAL TEXT. ANZTEL MARKETING PTY.



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