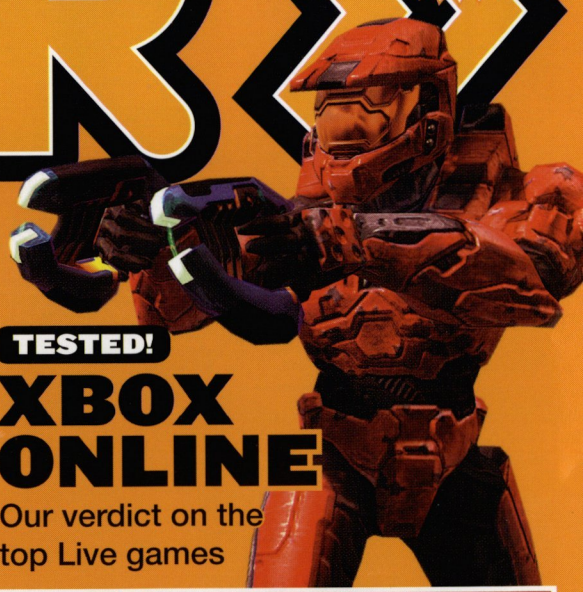
12 YEARS IN THE GAME: ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

HYPER

WIN A HOME THEATRE PROJECTOR!

TOP 50 GAMES

The Games We Can't Live Without!



TESTED!

XBOX ONLINE

Our verdict on the top Live games

XBOX 360

TEST DRIVE

Racing into the next generation

HANDS-ON

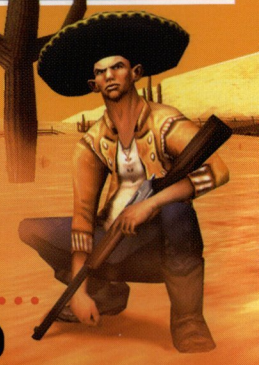
NINTENDOGS

The DS's quirkiest game yet. But is it just for the girls?

REVIEW

TOTAL OVERDOSE

More fun than an explosive piñata on PC, PS2 and Xbox



ACTIVATE 05

PREVIEW SPECIAL

- Quake 4
- Call of Duty 2
- The Movies
- True Crime: New York
- Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

PREVIEW

V8 SUPER CARS 3

PC REVIEW

DUNGEON SIEGE II

Great engine... but is there a game this time?

A next MAGAZINE

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G General

XBOX PlayStation.2

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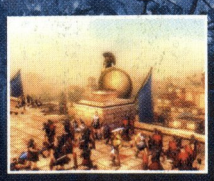

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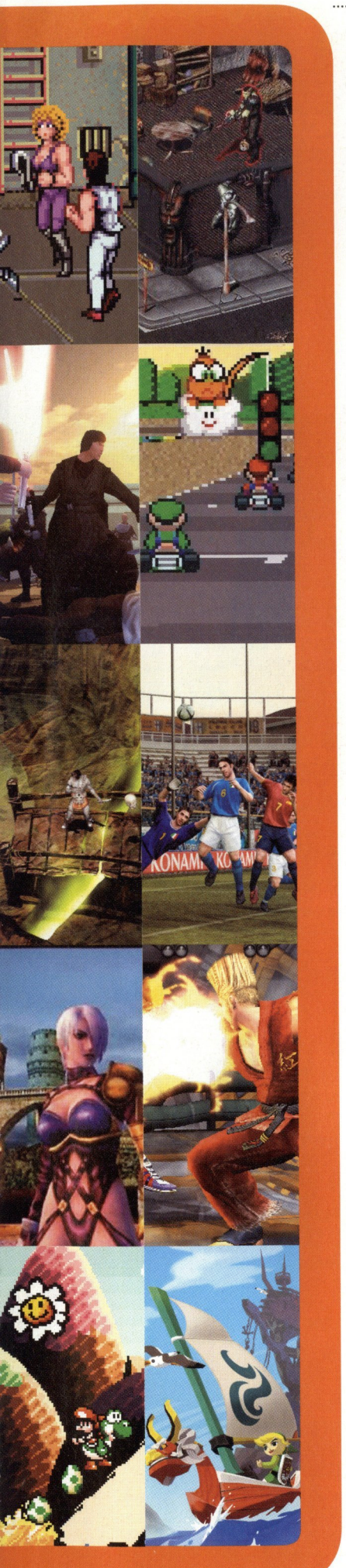
12 TOP 50 SPECIAL

The ultimate Hyper Top 50! The staff and writers put their collective heads together to brew up this list of the 50 most entertaining games of all time.



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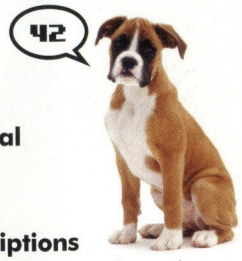

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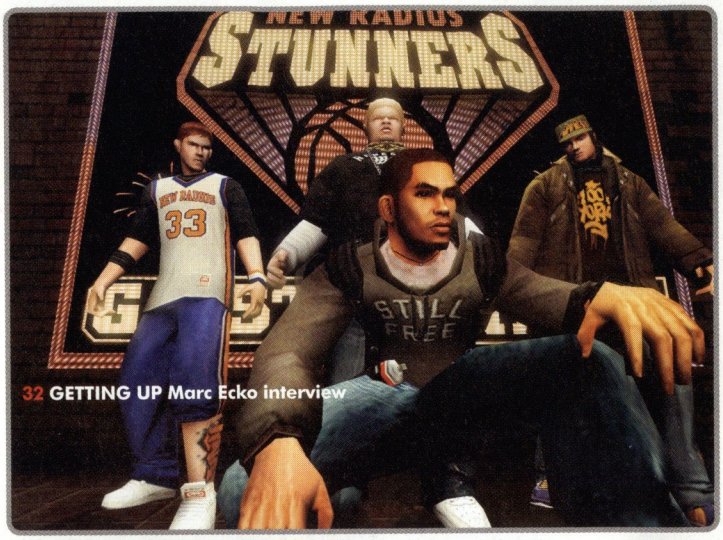

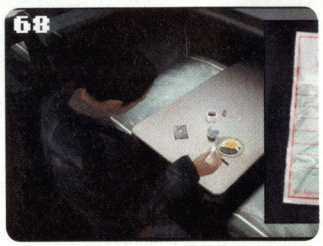

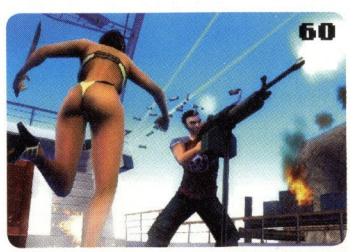

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EDITORIAL

>>Welcome back, good of you to stop by. You hold in your hands a landmark issue of Hyper. Number 144. 12 years of Hyper baby. That's a huge milestone to reach, especially in an industry that has changed so much since our inception. To celebrate, we got together with all our writers and put together another of our fabled "Top 50" games lists. But this time with a number of twists.

Rather than confine our choices to a certain era, we've thrown it wide open. Thus, Spacewar goes up against Pac-Man which goes up against San Andreas. We've also thrown the usual criteria for entry out the window, and instead of trying to compile a moderately objective list of the most "important" titles in videogame history, we're hitting you with the games that we personally have had the most fun with. It's not meant to be definitive, it's just meant to be 50 games that have rocked our world. This is a list devoted to gameplay and entertainment value, not to innovations in the medium. The other big change is - we haven't even ranked them. And why should we? It's impossible to quantify and then rank concepts like fun and entertainment, so we haven't. Putting the list together was certainly contentious, and there were some fantastic games that didn't make the cut, but right now, these are the 50 games we've most enjoyed in the history of videogames. Of course, we want to know which titles you guys (and gals) rate above all others as well, so on the final page of the feature, you'll find a voting form. Fill out your favourite games, send it in and we'll compile a list of the top games, to be published in a couple of issues time. Enjoy!

Cam Shea >>Editor

Wilks in all his buffness

Why do I have to be Cody?

Malks trying to look cool

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Total Overdose – Xbox
   "This game in a word? BLAU!"
2. Capcom Classics Collection – PS2
3. Nintendogs – Nintendo DS
4. Darkwatch – PS2
5. Virtua Tennis – PSP

Kosta Andreadis - Roving Reporter
1. Hot Shots Golf - PSP
   "Fun! Fun! Fun! The polar opposite of watching golf on TV, unless of course that delightful Tiger Woods is strutting his stuff."
2. Battlefield 2 - PC
3. Super Star Wars - SNES
4. No Limit Texas Hold 'Em - Online Poker
5. Ableton Live 5.0 - PC

Malcolm Campbell - Art
1. Nintendogs – Nintendo DS
   "Best. Game. Ever." – Malcolm's 3½-year-old daughter
2. Everybody's Golf - PSP
3. Ridge Racer - PSP
4. Wipeout Pure – PSP
5. Street Fighter 3: Third Strike - Xbox

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. Total Overdose – Xbox
   "A spaghetti western eats a taco and craps out pure gold"
2. Fahrenheit - Xbox
3. Another Code: Two Memories - Nintendo DS
4. Dungeon Siege II - PC
5. Nightmare Before Christmas - PS2

HYPER>>

ISSUE 144
OCTOBER 2005

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Printed CTP by: **WEBSTAR**
Distribution by: **Gordon & Gotch**
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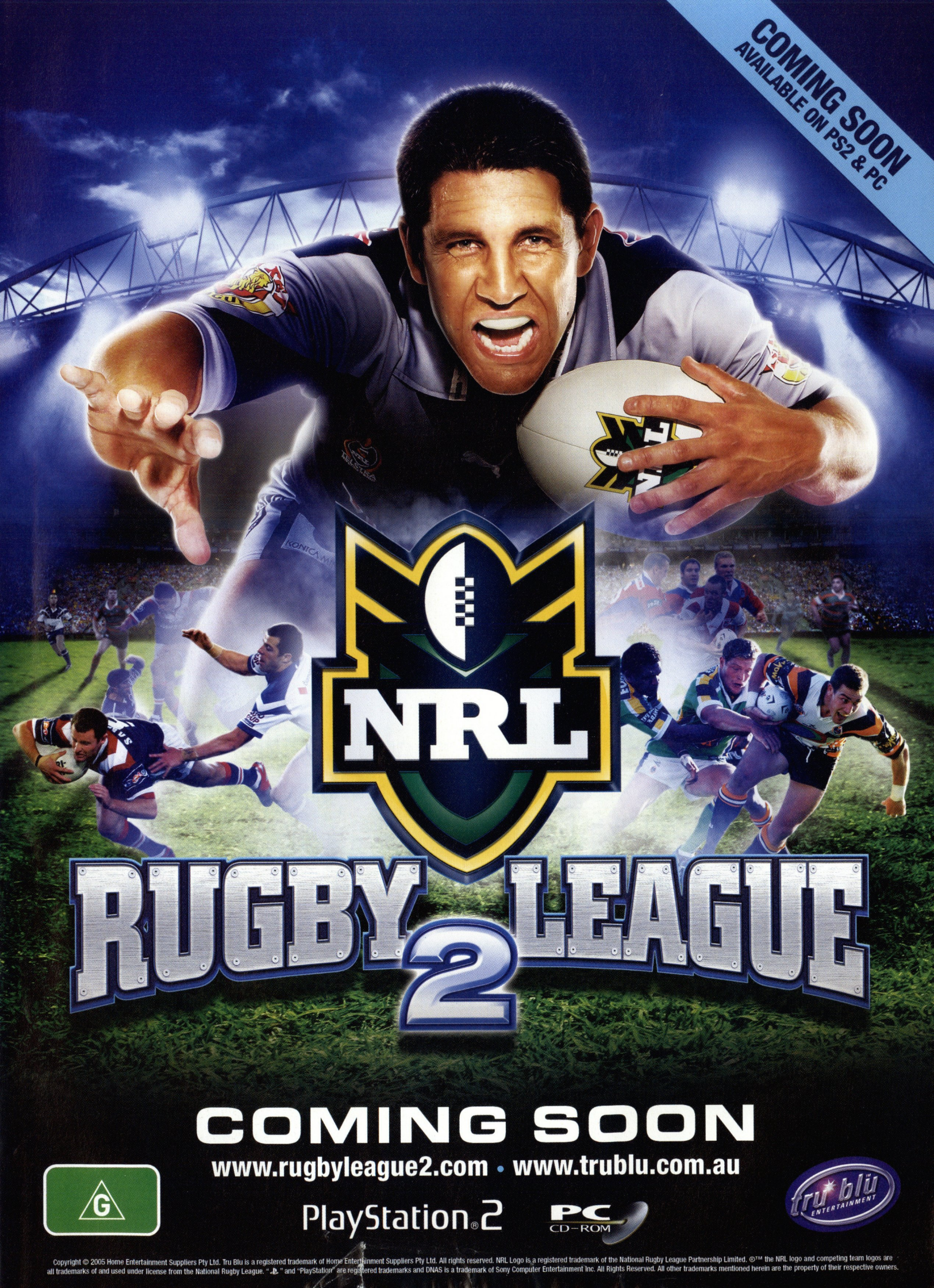

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News

IN DA NEWS: Sony hit back at 360 announcement - ten PS3 models to be available at launch / First Biohazard 5 shots!

THRILL RIDE

XBOX 360 PRICING REVEALED!

Two models to be available at launch

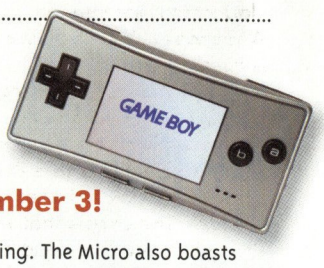
When the Xbox 360 launches in America, Europe and Japan later this year, consumers may be confused to find two models on store shelves. Yes, the rumours about a model that ships without a HD were true, and we're still shaking our heads in disbelief. Priced at $299.99 US (around $400 AU) is the Xbox 360 "Core System" which comes with the console, a wired controller, a faceplate and a standard AV cable. For the princely sum of $399.99 US (a little over $520 AU) gamers can "experience the ultimate digital entertainment thrill ride" according to the overly enthusiastic press release, and pick up the premium package which has the console, a 20GB detachable HD, a wireless controller, a media remote, a faceplate, a component AV cable and Xbox Live Silver membership. While you can pick up items like the HD separately, we doubt many gamers will be happy with anything less than the premium package. Other peripherals that will be available at launch include a 64MB memory unit, the Play & Charge kit (for wireless controller charging on the fly), a rechargeable battery pack, the wireless networking adapter, faceplates and the Xbox Live headset.

While we can understand Microsoft wanting to have a cheaper option available at launch, it seems odd that they'd feel the hard drive isn't essential, especially after championing the benefits of the Xbox hard drive, and designing the Xbox 360 to be seamlessly integrated with Live and multimedia functionality. It will also be interesting to hear how developers are faring designing games to work with or without the storage. Oh, and there's still no sign of a release date for Australia, although it will definitely be "early 2006".

NINTY

TINY HANDHELD, TINY(ISH) PRICE

Micro coming to Oz on November 3!



A release date and price have finally been confirmed for the seemingly redundant Game Boy Micro. The third iteration of the GBA will be released in Australia on November 3 for $149.95, with five colours available at launch and each unit coming with a second switchable face plate. The Micro is Nintendo's attempt to appeal to a more style conscious consumer, and will be "a unit that anyone will be comfortable pulling out at a bus stop, in a train or at the cafe," according to Rose Lappin, Director of Sales and Marketing. The Micro also boasts the brightest and sharpest GBA screen yet but on the other hand it's small (measuring 10cm wide, 5cm tall and 1.75cm deep) and the screen itself is tiny. Sure, it may look good when you pull it out of your pocket at a bus stop, but we'll have to wait until we've had more hands on time with the Micro to see how comfortable it is to use.

Very little in the way of advertising has been seen in the US as yet (it's out there September 19) leading some to believe that Nintendo may be leaving their marketing push too late. Of course, Nintendo may just be a lot more savvy than they are given credit for, and the Micro may do as well in the market as the DS, another Nintendo handheld that was heralded with a fair degree of scepticism.

EMINENCE IMMINENT!

ANOTHER NIGHT IN FANTASIA

An Electronic Game Expo for Sydney!

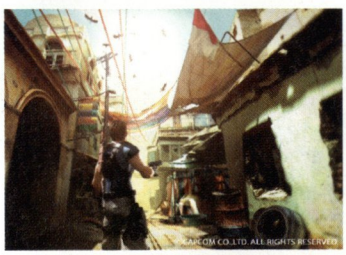
How would you like to hear music from Metal Gear Solid, Halo, The Legend of Zelda, Final Fantasy, Gran Turismo, World of Warcraft, Super Mario Bros, Fruits Basket, Naruto, Rurouni Kenshin, Howl's Moving Castle, Spirited Away and Gundam SeeD performed by a full orchestra? Well, October 30th is the night that it's going to happen thanks, once again, to the Eminence Orchestra and A Night in Fantasia 2005. This year's event is being held at the Sydney Town Hall and it's going to be huge! Plus, if you get your tickets (from www.eminenceonline.com or at Books Kinokuniya in the Galeries Victoria, Sydney) before September 25th you'll save $30 on the door price. For anime and videogame fans, this is an event not to be missed!

And it gets better! We're also pleased to report that on the same day, from 11AM to 7PM at the Sydney Town Hall, Eminence have organised an Electronic Games Expo – a day for gamers to check out the latest titles on the horizon from some of gaming's biggest developers and publishers, as well as compete in tournaments, see performances and win prizes. We'll have more on this next month, but for now – if you can get to Sydney for the 30th of October, snap up your tickets for A Night in Fantasia 2005!

A NIGHT IN FANTASIA 2005

1ST LOOK RESIDENT EVIL 5 XBOX 360 SCREENS!

Resident Evil 5 PS3, XBOX 360 **Developer:** Capcom • **The Hype:** "An unbelievable level of detail, realism and control."



Bad Cop No Doughnut

DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR

EVERYONE IS DUMB, INCLUDING ME.

Everyone in the industry is dumb. Everyone looking at the industry is dumb. Everyone even vaguely related to the industry is dumb. Rockstar is dumb for denying the existence of the "Hot Coffee" code in the console versions of GTA: San Andreas for as long as they did. The OFLC was dumb for retroactively banning a game with sexual content that can only be accessed by either downloading a mod that unlocks it in the PC code or requires the use of a device that breaks the EULA of the console code. Walmart is dumb for thinking that pulling a lucrative game off the shelves will win them over with the religious right. Hillary Clinton is dumb if she thinks that games are a strong enough platform to ride into the Whitehouse. Jack Thompson is dumb for stating in an interview that he was going to help Hilary Clinton ride the games issue all the way to the Whitehouse. Uwe Boll is dumb and doesn't need a qualifier. The people that went to see House of the dead in enough numbers to warrant a sequel are really dumb and I hate them. Fox is dumb for cancelling Firefly, even moreso now I've seen Serenity and it's so damn good (that has nothing to do with the industry but I did say I was dumb as well). Jack Thompson is dumb for pulling quotes from his opposition out of his arse. I'm dumb for getting sucked in to all of these damn arguments and spending my time getting aggravated instead of being constructed. I guess that's what we get for being human. Those more polite than me may say that it is a human luxury to learn from our mistakes. We don't we compound them. We dig ourselves out of holes or jump in head first without checking the depth. My name is Daniel Wilks and I'm dumb.

WINNERS HYPER 142

LAND OF THE DEAD

- Luke Manuel, Port Pirie, SA
- A Humpries, Narrogin, WA
- Kent Cheetham, Woodridge, QLD
- Michael Helton, Jindalee, QLD
- Adam Kauschke, Prospect, SA
- Tanya Lansdell, Werrington, NSW
- Aaron Jakubenko, Mill Park, VIC
- James Randall, Walkley Heights, SA
- Luther Carrol, Mansfield, VIC
- Jason Onezime, Craigieburn, VIC

ATARI FLASHBACK

- Brendan J. Bridle, Mudgee, NSW
- Beau Hansen, Mullumbimby, NSW
- Ian Gielen, Yarra Junction, VIC
- Luke Eller, North Gosford, NSW
- Benita Green, Warwick, QLD

ADDICTS?

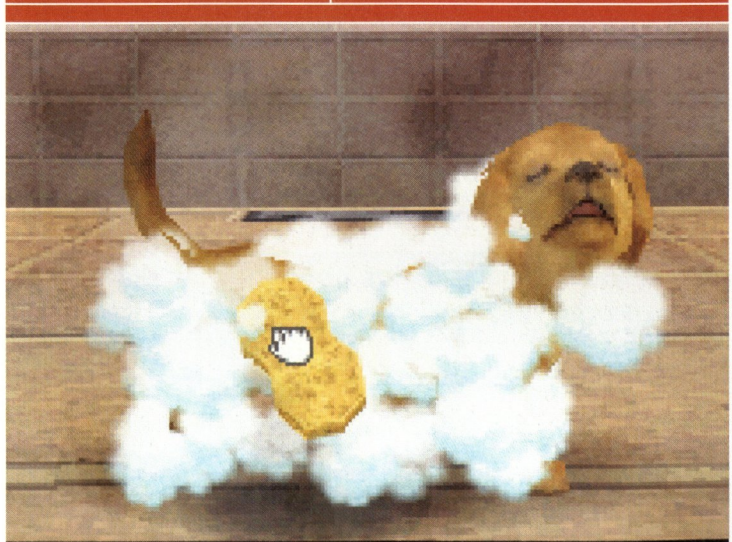
TEH INTAR-WEB IS TEH DEVIL!

We're all a little sick

Gaming and the Internet has claimed yet more victims this month. A Korean man (isn't that always the way) has died of a massive heart attack after a 50+ hour gaming marathon. Wouldn't someone at the internet café have noticed the man was sitting at a station, only moving to answer the call of nature for over two days? In related news The Australian reports that China has opened the world's first hospital for Internet addicts. The Beijing Military Hospital clinic for Internet addicts treats the syndrome in much the same way as any other debilitating addiction. The doctor in charge of the clinic Tao Ran, an industry professional with over 20 years experience in dealing with addictions boasts that he has around a 70% success rate with curing addicts. With around 100 million Internet users in China Tao and the gang look as though they're going to be earning the $70 a day that each patient has to pay in fees.

CAPTION THIS! PART 71

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 71 in the subject line.



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Jeremy Piets, Hobart, TAS
Adrian Flores, North Ryde, NSW
Rose McCoubrie, Maylands, WA
Matthew Courtney, Burbury, WA

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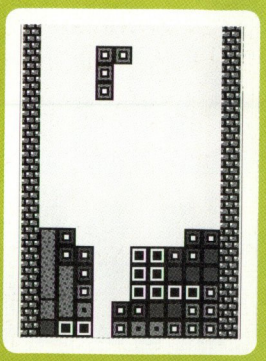
THE HYPER CREW'S TOP 50 GAMES

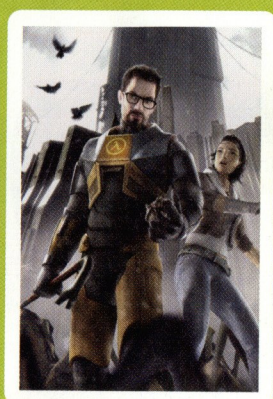
The Top 50. It's a tradition as old as throwing salt over your shoulder, saying "bless you" to someone after they sneeze to stop the devil from stealing their soul, or making fun of Bryce but this time around we thought we'd take a different approach. In the past we've always tried ranking the games with some sort of empirical system and have had to kludge the list to fit in games that are considered too "important" too ignore. Not this time. Welcome to the Top 50 list 2k5 in our 12th anniversary issue. This time we decided to focus on the games that the Hyper crew, past and present as well as our contributors love, go back and play and have fond memories of. You may notice some games that have been mainstays of Top 50 lists for years missing from ours. You may not like it. So be it. Now, in all its glory we present to you the 12th Anniversary Hyper Top 50 Games of all time. Enjoy.

TETRIS

BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE. GAME BOY. 1989

In the history of gaming is there any game more perfect than Tetris on Game Boy? The line-making gameplay is accessible to anyone with thumbs, there is infinite replayability, there's always a challenge due to the random nature of the drops and above all it's stupidly fun. The game was so addictive on release that doctors were treating hand cramps which became colloquially know as "Tetris Thumbs".

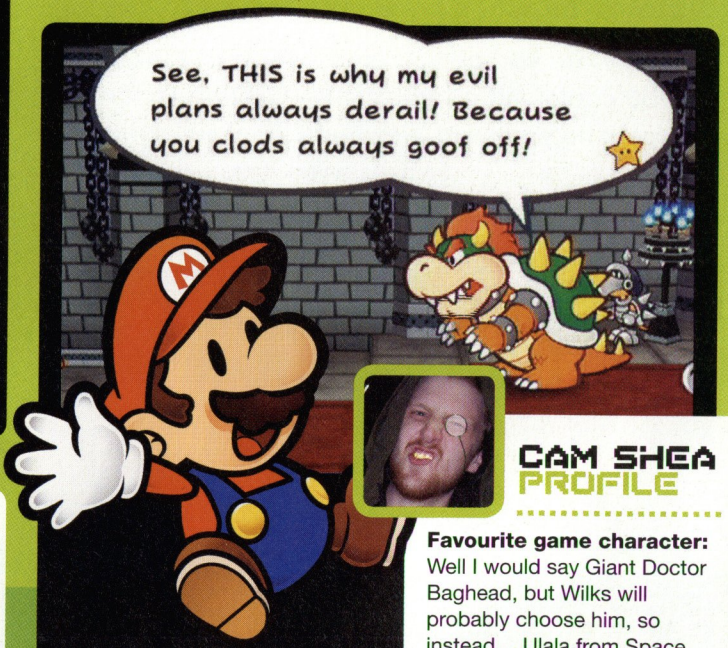




HALF-LIFE 2

VALVE. PC. 2004

It was a real toss-up between Half-Life and Half-Life 2 as to which made the list but the long anticipated sequel made the cut in the end for three reasons. HL2 is the first game we've ever played in which physics were integrated so thoroughly into gameplay that it became gameplay rather than a gimmick used for ragdolling. Secondly, the pacing of HL2 is without a doubt sublime – just when you're getting sick of run and gun you get to drive, get sick of that and it's a physics puzzle or a survival horror or what have you. Finally, Alex is hawt.



PAPER MARIO: Thousand Year Door

NINTENDO. GCN. 2004

"Was it a bad idea to neglect my already diminished social life to finish this game? Was it disturbing that I was aroused by Evil Peach? The answer to both questions is – most certainly, but therein lies the beauty of Thousand Year Door – it's funny, it's charming, it has great battle mechanics, plenty of secrets and some of the coolest visual design and music ever to grace the Cube. Or any other system. Genius." **Cam Shea**

CAM SHEA PROFILE

Favourite game character: Well I would say Giant Doctor Baghead, but Wilks will probably choose him, so instead... Ulala from Space Channel 5. Sexy and stylish, she's got the whole package.

Favourite boss: L block from Tetris. Man that guy was tough to beat.

Favourite weapon: Rail Gun – Q3A. Precise, brutally definitive, god-like power in the palm of your mouse. It was a great Eliot-killer too.

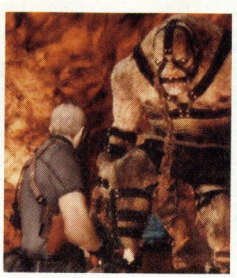
Favourite death: Accidental chain reaction kills in Worms are always brilliant. And I could kiss Lemmings for including the nuke button.

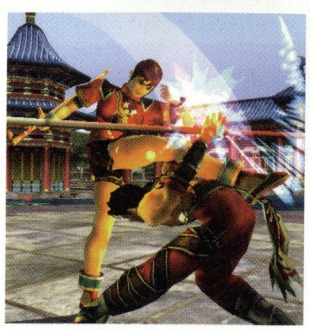
Favourite system: PSone

RESIDENT EVIL 4

CAPCOM. GAMECUBE. 2005

A completely new avenue for the series to take with more freedom of control, more action and a much appreciated move away from zombies. When we first got our hands on it we feared that the new approach to the series may not have been as scary as the previous games. Late, sleepless nights, tension stiffened shoulders and mysterious stains on Stephen Farrelly's couch proved us very wrong.

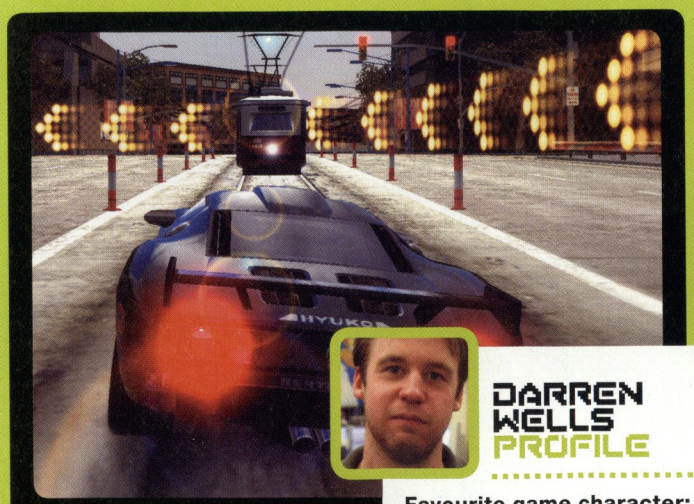




SOULCALIBUR

NAMCO. DREAMCAST. 1999

For all of us at Hyper and many of you reading, SoulCalibur was the first time we looked at a game and realised just how beautiful they could be. This was the game that ushered in the generation. Sure the Dreamcast may have gone the way of the dodo but SoulCalibur had it all, gorgeous graphics, deep, intuitive gameplay, great characters and so much replayability it boggles the mind.



DARREN WELLS PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Cate Archer from No One Lives Forever. Smart, sassy and shagadelically sexy. Yeah baby!

Favourite boss:
Either The Profound Darkness in Phantasy Star IV, who you must beat *three* times, or Bob the Goldfish in Earthworm Jim, where you've simply got to, erm, knock over a fish bowl.

Favourite weapon:
The Rocket Launcher in Quake III. What other weapon gives you a rocket-powered jump boost when required, and can splatter your opponents across several walls?

Favourite death:
Sub Zero's uncensored fatality in Mortal Kombat 1. Ahh, towards-down-towards-high punch, how awesome you were in all your spine-dangly goodness.

Favourite system:
Nothing beats the PC, unchallenged in its range of titles, backwards compatibility and graphical capabilities.

BURNOUT 3

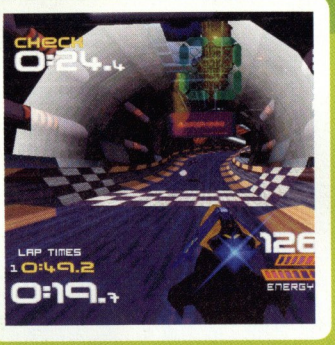
CRITERION. PS2. 2004

"There are racing games, and there is Burnout 3. Brash and brazen, loud and proud, the game not only breaks all the rules of what a racing game should be, but sends them screaming into oncoming traffic and launches them skyward. Everything about it oozes attention to detail: graphics are superb, the soundtrack is pumping, and the AI is simply ruthless with on-road opponents as bent on seeing your car wrapped around a lamppost as any enraged human. Races go from "hella fast" at the height of the Burnout boost, to "uber slow-mo" as spectacular crashes – or "takedowns" – are shown off to full effect. It's simple in its pick-up-and-play hook, but challenging in its irresistible lure to unlock each and every gold medal. The result of all this? A damn fine game that actually succeeds in making crashing fun." **Darren "Hottie Funbags" Wells**

RIDGE RACER

NAMCO. PSP. 2005

You may think that a game that has only just been released is a little misplaced in a top 50 list but you'd be wrong. Ridge Racer on PSP is the ultimate version of the game. It looks sweet, sounds awesome and has handling that puts its console brethren to shame. It doesn't take long to realise this either – the first time you bust out a perfect drift around a corner you're in nitrous injected heaven.



WIPEOUT 2097

PSYGNOSIS. PLAYSTATION. 1996

Yeah, they may have "sold out" with the "Red Bull Increases reaction Time" billboards scattered around the courses but even so, you'll not find as fast and precise a racer as WipEout 2097. Later games in the series may have been better looking but in many ways they were compromised, either through framerate, sense of speed of track design. 2097 still stands above them all.

TIM LEVY PROFILE

Favourite game character:
JC Denton. You can augment him. Gotta love being able to strengthen your legs so you can jump from high rise buildings and survive.

Favourite boss:
Wario or is it Yuri or perhaps Donkey Kong? Otherwise, some bosses on WOW look amazing.

Favourite weapon:
Knife in BF1942. Huge stupid knife fights is one of the funniest things you can do online.

Favourite death:
With an ace pilot (HotDog) hot on my (almost destroyed) tail in BF1942, I put the plane into a steep dive and aim at an Anti Aircraft gun in an airfield. At the last moment I jump out, hit the 'chute, land in the AA gun, spin it around, shoot down the incoming plane at close range, and then leap back out as the wreckage takes out the AA gun.

Favourite system:
N64 - it's party game central.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS. PC. 2002

"I don't know about the kids of today, but back in the day when videogames consisted of a dot being shuffled between 2 lines, we had to make our own fun building billycarts, cubbyhouses and playing 'armies' down in the bush. Battlefield has unfortunately rendered all these past times obsolete. Nothing can compare to the visceral action of defending a base against the overwhelming odds of a Panzer and Stuka attack. Or re-enacting the Battle of Britain in huge dogfights over the English Channel. It's my fave game because of its sheer intensity, the amount of skills to master, no two rounds are the same and that it is actually hilarious at times.

TONY HAWK 2

NEVERSOFT. PLAYSTATION. 2000

Take the already remarkably deep gameplay of the original Tony Hawk, add new tricks and a bridging move (the manual), tighten up the level design so you can bust out long trick runs and add variety to the soundtrack and you have a handle on some of the things that make Tony Hawk 2 great. It was a toss up which Tony game made it into the list but number 2 pipped all others at the post thanks to its brilliant level design.

DOOM

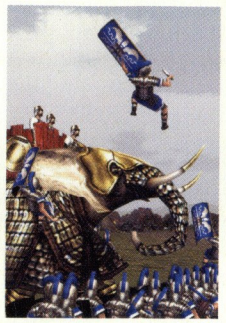
ID SOFTWARE. PC. 1995

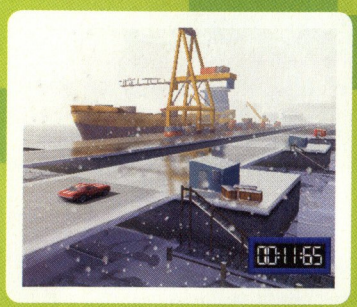
Now here's a title that just goes to prove you don't need a plot to have a compelling game. Before anyone argues that Doom had a plot, the fact that there were demons on Mars is not a plot – it's merely an excuse to kill things. Luckily the killing things bit of the game proved to be remarkably strong – bugger clever AI, just throw tons of enemies at us in well designed arenas and we'll be happy.

ROME: Total War

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY. PC. 2004

Rome: Total War redefined the word epic for us. The scope of the game is just so damn big that sometimes it's hard to get your head around. Essentially two games in one, we (meaning Wilks) could immerse ourselves in the turn based management and ignore the combat or vice-versa. We're normally not big fans of RTS due to the fact that most strategy in RTS games seems to revolve around building the hardest troops the fastest and overwhelming the enemy with sheer weight of numbers.

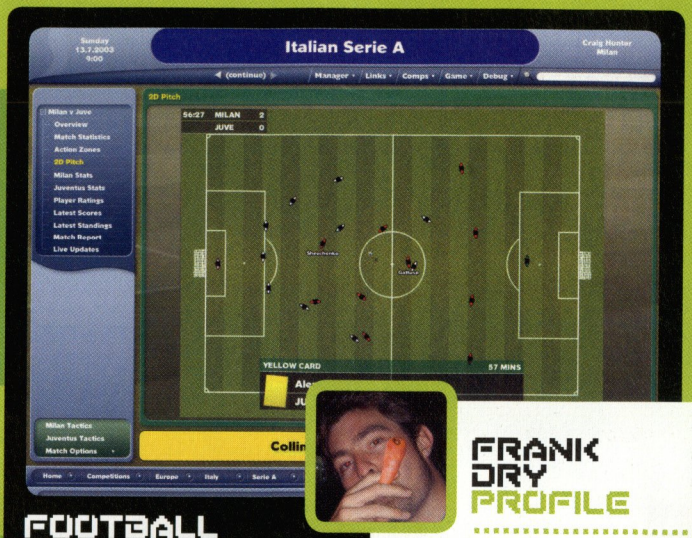




MASHED

SUPERSONIC. PS2. 2004

For those of you who have played Mashed, all we'd have to do is write the words "It's Mashed" 50 times to describe how great the game is. Excellent courses and incredible multiplayer make this the pinnacle of semi-top down racers. Just be prepared to do a healthy amount of trash-talking.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

SI GAMES. PC. 2005

"The ultimate example of gameplay over graphics, Football Manager 2005 (representing the series as a whole essentially - we've been playing this thing since the first couple of games came out) is, to those who live and breath football, the closest we're ever going to get to our "actual" purpose in life - running a football club. It may look like a spreadsheet, but the level of depth and complexity means that everything from the training regime to dealing with the press, hiring and firing multi-million dollar players and tweaking your tactics on the field is accounted for, and can be manipulated to your cruel and unyielding desires. You could play this all the way to the grave." **Frank Dry**

FRANK DRY PROFILE

Favourite game character:
The King of All Cosmos from Katamari Damacy - he's just so fruity and cool.

Favourite boss:
Robo-Z from Bust A Groove. It was a dance off against a building sized robot designed for one purpose - ladelling out bowls of funky dancing justice.

Favourite weapon:
It begins and ends with the double shotgun in Doom 2. Predictable answer I know...

Favourite death:
Anything involving sticky grenades, physics and rag dolling in Halo.

Favourite system:
You ask me to choose which of my children I love the most? That's a bit sick, but hey, I'll go with SNES.

MALCOLM CAMPBELL PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Chun-Li, particularly Alpha-era. Nice sneakers, and I won't hear a bad word said about those thighs.

Favourite boss:
Sephiroth in his one-winged angel form was epic, then the ultimate satisfaction of finishing him one-on-one with Omnislash.

Favourite weapon:
I loved the how low-tech the Quake Rocket Launcher felt, like a metal tube with a firecracker inside.

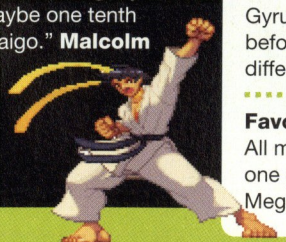
Favourite death:
Gyruss – the momentary pause before exploding makes all the difference. Or Quad gibs.

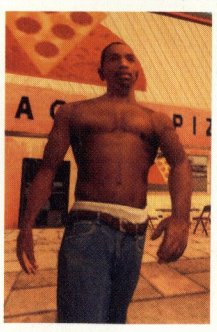
Favourite system:
All my consoles have at least one game I can't live without... MegaDreamGameBoxStation 2

STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

CAPCOM. ARCADE. 1999

"The Street Fighter games will always be at the top of my favourite games list, and Third Strike sits comfortably at number one. I love the back-to-basics supers, the (almost) all new cast, the parry system, and the gorgeous art and animation. But most of all I love it when, with no health left, I successfully parry Urien's Chariot Tackle and follow-up with Makoto's Seichusen Godanzuki, knocking his loinclothed arse flying for a Super Art finish and convincing myself that I have maybe one tenth the skillz of Daigo." **Malcolm Campbell**





GTA: San Andreas

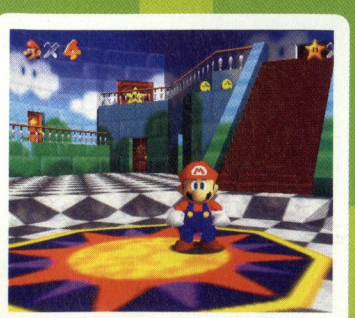
ROCKSTAR. PS2. 2004

Cam believes that there's a little gangster in all of us, and if the success of GTA: San Andreas is anything to go by, he is right. GTA3 had excellent city design and Vice City had excellent missions and atmosphere but San Andreas is the first GTA game to really combine both. Add to that the ability to customise the character, a fantastic soundtrack and literally hundreds of hours of gameplay and you have yourself a winner. If you can get your hands on a copy now that the OFLC has decided to ban it anyway.

MARIO 64

NINTENDO. NINTENDO 64. 1996

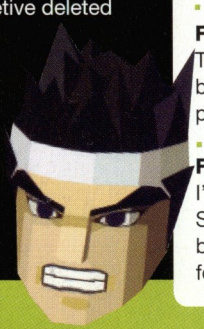
Mario 64 belongs on every top 50 list, not just because it was the game that ushered in the 3D generation and showed us exactly what we should be expecting. It also deserves to be on lists because it's brilliantly fun. Little can compare to the satisfaction of getting that one star that's been out of reach.



VIRTUA FIGHTER 2

SEGA. SEGA SATURN. 1995

"This was the game I bought a Saturn for. This was the only game I had on my Saturn. What more did I need? Awesome fighting engine, sweet controls, deep-deep gameplay and some pretty sexy (for the time) graphics wasted many an hour for my friends and I who would frequently get together of an afternoon and beat the living polygonal shit out of each other. Now if only the midget finder (actual expletive deleted to protect readers with delicate sensibilities – Ed) who stole my Saturn would return it I could play my beloved VF2 again. Prick."
Daniel Wilks



DANIEL WILKS PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Is there anything better than a gay, masked wrestling vampire? I say no. Maybe Ragnaros.

Favourite boss:
See first answer. I'm also quite partial to the Hydra in God of War.

Favourite weapon:
Trash talk in mutiplayer games.

Favourite death:
The one and only time I ever beat Malky at Streeties was pretty damn sweet.

Favourite system:
I've got a soft spot for the Saturn but I love my PC because it satisfies my need for RPGs.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

BLIZZARD. PC. 2004

Kind of like a Fischer Price "My First MMO", World of Warcraft is incredibly accessible to both hardcore and casual players and offers a whole lot to love. There are still some issues with balance and some of the promised content is still being ironed out but nonetheless, WoW is the most enjoyable (and dare we say addictive?) MMO on the market at the moment. 3.5 million active accounts can't be wrong.

YOSHI'S ISLAND

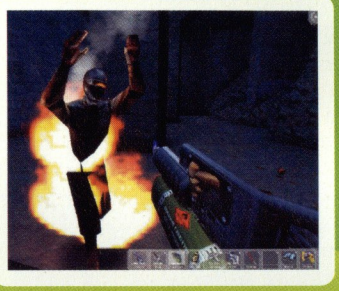
NINTENDO. SNES. 1995

Little dinosaurs and baby Mario together at last. Aside from being one of the cutest games ever developed (baby Mario is just so adorable), Yoshi's Island took all the platforming greatness of previous Mario games and added a few new gameplay mechanics such as turning enemies into eggs into the mix. Every serious game collection should have a copy.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

KONAMI. PS2. 2004

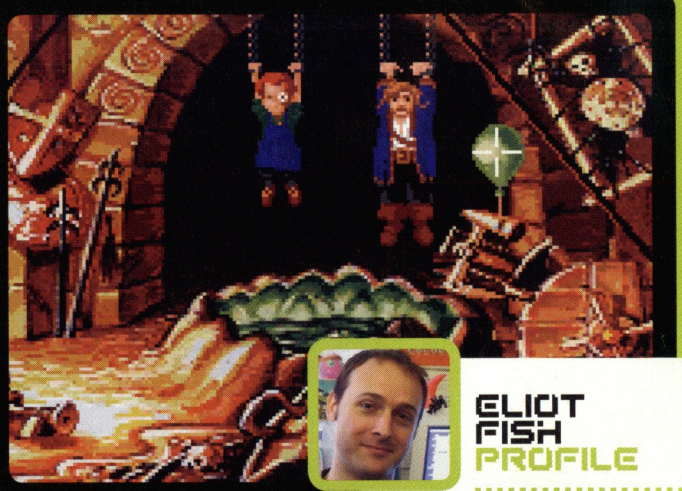
Low scores and ties? You bet. Pro Evolution Soccer 4 stands head and shoulders above all other soccer games on the market as the most realistic and most fun. Single player makes for a challenge but having a bunch of mates around and going head to head or co-op against a screamingly hard AI team takes the cake.



DEUS EX

ION STORM. PC. 2000

Part RPG, part FPS, all genius. So much freedom to explore and tackle objectives in your own way. So many great characters to meet, interact with and shoot in the back of the head. So many genius plot twists packed into one game. No matter what anyone says, we liked Invisible War as well. Bring on Deus Ex 3.



THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND 2: Le Chuck's Revenge

LUCASARTS. PC. 1991

"Trying to decide upon a favourite game is a ridiculously tough task. Ask me tomorrow and I might give you a different answer. However, if there's one game that always seems to pop into my head when this question is asked, it's The Secret of Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge (followed closely by the first Monkey Island). Why? Adventure games were my favourite type of game, until they completely sunk without a trace. Le Chuck's Revenge is easily one of the best adventure games ever made, thanks to the quality of its writing and the incredible charm of its artwork. It's also the only game that's ever made me laugh out loud." **Eliot Fish**

ELIOT FISH PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Guybrush Threepwood from the first two Monkey Island games. When he went 3D and gained a voice, he lost a lot of his charm.

Favourite boss:
Snake from Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. He's Big Boss by the end of it, right? Ha!

Favourite weapon:
The Lightsaber from any number of Star Wars action games. How can you beat a Lightsaber for best weapon ever?

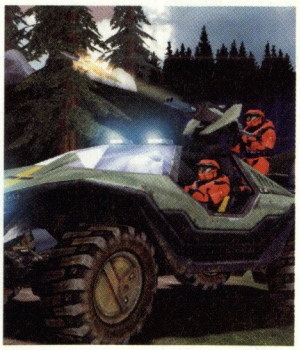
Favourite death:
When I get touched by a ghost in Pac-Man. Pac-Man has the best videogame death ever.

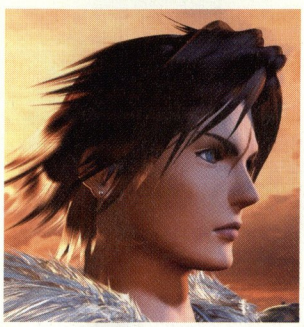
Favourite system:
The PC. I was tempted to put down the SNES, or even the PS2, but the PC has always been there for me.

HALO

BUNGIE. XBOX. 2003

As it currently stands, Halo is the be all and end all of console FPS. Excellent level design, great controls, weapons and vehicles, plus superlative multiplayer blow all of the competition out of the water. Hell, we used to get in trouble for skiving off work of an afternoon to play CTF or deathmatch in the back room – there's only so many months you can get away with saying that you're reviewing the same game before somebody catches on.

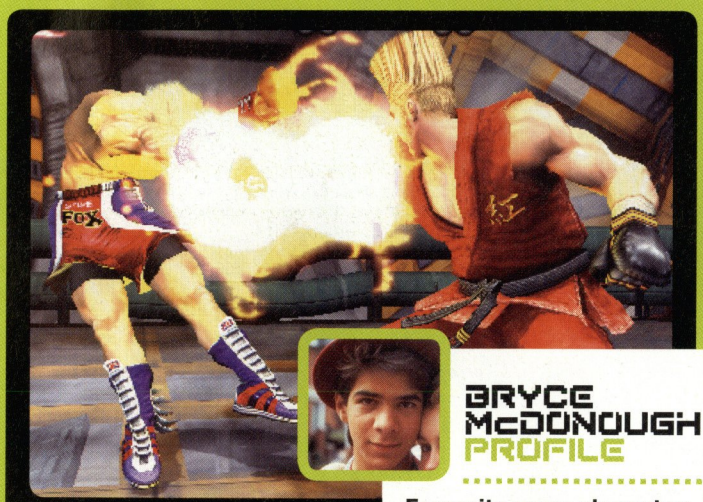




FINAL FANTASY VIII

SQUARE. PLAYSTATION. 1999

This will get us a bit of hate mail but we love Final Fantasy VIII. Beautiful looks, a great story and excellent mechanics make it a top FF game. And how can you not fall in love with Squall Lionheart? He's a postmodern emo lovechild – an angst ridden loner who realises he's an angst ridden loner and gets all angsty about the fact. Brilliant.



TEKKEN 5

NAMCO. PS2. 2005

"To call Tekken the greatest fighting game series of all time may be somewhat presumptuous, but for fans of the game, nothing else comes close. After the very disappointing Tekken 4, Tekken 5 has returned to its roots of hard-hitting, fast-moving characters, with an emphasis on juggles. As Ben Lee might say, "just the way I like it." The new mechanics brought to T5 really add to the game and the presentation and graphics simply couldn't be slicker. With a 5.1 patch hitting arcades, can we expect the same service for our PS2s? Fingers crossed." **Bryce McDonough**

BRYCE McDONOUGH PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Klonoa. Or PaRappa. They are both too cool.

Favourite boss:
Hmm…Thunderforce IV on Megadrive. Biggest, baddest, almost impossible to kill. Ugly as sin too.

Favourite weapon:
Seung Mina's "Morning Star" in the original Soul Edge

Favourite death:
Lemmings. Nuke button. 'Nuff said. Shooting 'Paratrooper' parachutes and watching the men explode into pixels is almost as good.

Favourite system:
I've always said Megadrive. But thinking about it now, PSX has got to be top spot. Too many awesome games.

SUPER METROID

NINTENDO. SNES. 1994

"As one of the very few side-scrolling action/adventure sci-fi games around, Super Metroid is an engrossing experience from start to finish, featuring a game world that encourages exploration and with many 'just out or reach' scenarios, it entices the inquisitive mind to keep playing. Having a female protagonist may have altered people's perception on the series, but in the end the gameplay is leagues above the rather rudimentary story, where gamers are provided one of the best examples of intuitive exploration and item/weapon progression in videogame history. But the experience that is Super Metroid is also very far from epic as with a good walkthrough the game can be finished in a few hours. Longevity may not be one of its hallmarks but this still serves as one of the more amazing pieces of game design, and playing it is the only way to find out why." **Kosta Andriadis**

KOSTA ANDREADIS PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Sam (Sam n' Max Hit the Road - PC) the straight-dog to the crazy-rabbit Max, is one of videogame's comically driest and hence funniest characters.

Favourite boss:
Bowser (Mario Series), and for the record Mario says "So Long-a Bowser" when he lets go of his tail in Mario 64.

Favourite weapon:
BFG (Doom II PC) because it lives up to its namesake, and firing it results in quite a shit-storm.

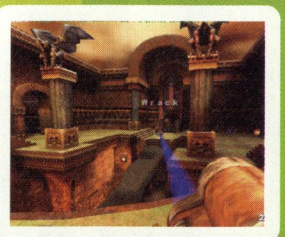
Favourite death:
Leon S. Kennedy's chainsaw decapitation in Resident Evil 4 (GCN), because it's sudden, violent and has a distinct air of finality to it.

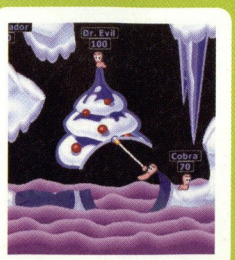
Favourite system:
The N64, with Mario 64, Ocarina of Time, and GoldenEye, better times have not been had before or since - by me anyway.

QUAKE III ARENA

ID SOFTWARE. PC. 1999

All we have to say about the greatness of Quake III Arena can the summed up in two words. Longest Yard. However, since we have a few more words to play around with we will also say, gibs, railgun, rocket launcher, jump pads, easy modding, stupid campers, gauntlet kills and shotgun.





WORMS 2

TEAM 17. PC. 1998

More games need ninja ropes and exploding sheep. It's as simple as that. Brilliant game design wrapped around the simple concept of turn-based real-time worm genocide. There are many multiplayer games on the market but few reach the hilarious heights of being blown off a ledge only to be saved by the one pixel that remains.

SEAMUS BYRNE PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Manny Calavera from Grim Fandango. Ever seen a reaper with such panache?

Favourite boss:
M. Bison from Street Fighter. He's one BMF and has some of the coolest moves in a fighting game.

Favourite weapon:
When you doubled your ship in Galaga. Awesome when you were captured but then scored your wing man to take a few levels apart!

Favourite death:
Drifting around a busy street corner to clean up the crowds in Carmageddon. The screams! The screams!!

Favourite system:
Nintendo Game & Watch. You never let go of your first love.

PLANESCAPE TORMENT

BLACK ISLE. PC. 1999

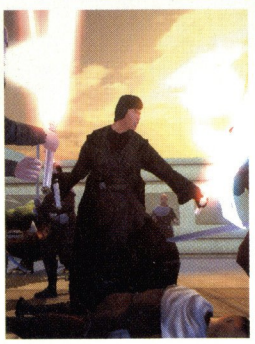
"As a pen-and-paper D&D geek, I've played a lot of CRPGs and often thought I could have spent that time having more fun with friends around the table. Torment changed all that, offering an amazing story with an awesome central character plus the best NPCs ever conceived. Morte ruled! And the need to talk to your party to advance the epic plotlines was a revelation! This was all an RPG nerd could ask for, computer or no.

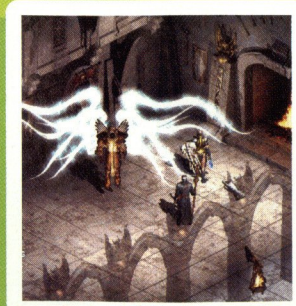
Because of Torment, I still dream we'll see the Planescape D&D setting resurrected one day. But please no sequels! The game was perhaps the perfect one-shot RPG epic."
Seamus Byrne

KOTOR 2

LUCASARTS. XBOX. 2004

Another relatively new game on the list but it's here for a good reason. KOTOR 2 features a wonderfully well thought out story, some fantastic characters, great locations and some of the best dialogue to come along in recent years. It's a pity that some of the character endings that were culled didn't make it into the final game (though they can be accessed through a bit of judicious data-mining) but none the less, it's the best Star Wars game around.





DIABLO 2

BLIZZARD. PC. 2000

Left click, left click, left click, left click, right click, left click, left click, etcetera. Sure, the mechanics of gameplay are repetitive but they're also rewarding as you get to see your character level up and become progressively more powerful and the item drops come at such a pace that you always feel like you're getting something new. The story was pretty kick-arse too.

GRIM FANDANGO

LUCASARTS. PC. 1998

Skeleton travel agents, monstrous petrol heads, balloons filled with goo – does gaming get much funnier than this? Grim Fandango is only one of many superb LucasArts adventure games but to our mind it stands out not only because of the brilliant sense of humour but also because the story of lost love is remarkably touching.

CASTLEVANIA: Symphony of the Night

KONAMI. PLAYSTATION. 1997

Combine great controls, awe inspiring level design, huge replay value, a great combat mechanic and lashes of style and you have a damn fine game. Add the fact that it's Castlevania on top of that and you have a bloody amazing game. Quite possible the best side scrolling action/platformer on the PlayStation.

STEVE FARRELLY PROFILE

Favourite game character:
Either Samus Aran or Link, I'm undecided.

Favourite boss:
Metroid Prime.

Favourite weapon:
Exclusive Broken Butterfly from Resident Evil 4.

Favourite death:
Leon's beheading from Resident Evil 4.

Favourite system:
GameCube.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: Wind Waker

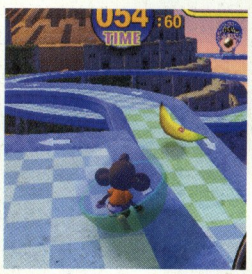
NINTENDO. GAMECUBE. 2002

"It's arguable this isn't the best Zelda title ever; especially given the game borrows much from the coveted Ocarina of Time. But a point to be made is in Wind Waker's representation of the Zelda universe, in that the original idea and vision Miyamoto had for the series is only truly realised through the unique and engaging presentation of the game. The initial idea behind the Zelda series was that the universe itself was not so different from the universe a child creates playing in the woods, to this end the story-book feel and dreamscape themes of Wind Waker further root the title in the realm of fantasy and help remove it from any real 'gaming' roots. Wind Waker is an escapist land of immense scale and engagement and there are few games of this caliber willing to take the artistic plunge needed to push videogames beyond realism and into surrealist adventure".
Stephen Farrelly

CHRONO TRIGGER

SQUARE. SNES. 1995

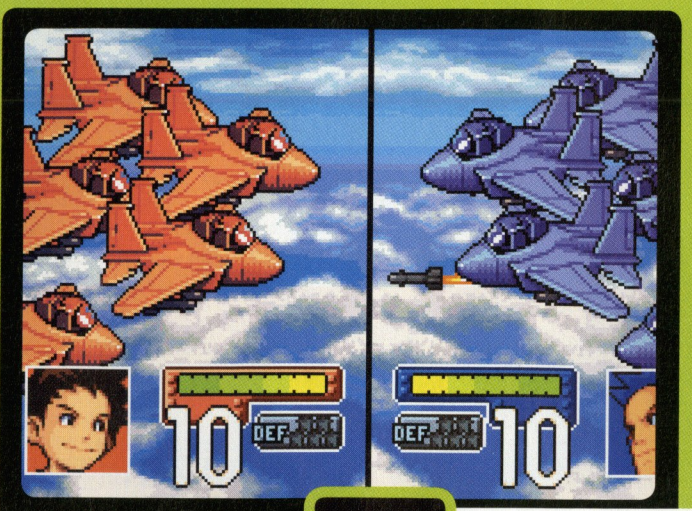
Many people have called Chrono Trigger the greatest ever console RPG and who are we to argue? The battle mechanics are nigh on perfect and the graphics are the best that Mode 7 have ever provided (with Super Mario Kart running a close second) but above all is the story. You'll love it and want to play through again and again to discover all of the warmth and charm, not to mention unlock all of the 16 different endings.



SUPER MONKEY BALL

AMUSEMENT VISION. GCN. 2001

If the whole idea of monkeys in balls doesn't tickle your fancy we suggest you go and have your fancy inspected by a professional because it could be severely infected or dead. Marble Madness meets mini-games – what more could you want? Screw it – we don't need to justify loving this game any more than simply saying MONKEYS! AND THEY'RE IN BALLS!



ADVANCE WARS

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS. GBA. 2001

"Nintendo's known for banking on a star name rather than stellar content, so it's refreshing that we still play Advance Wars, not because of Andy or Sami or Nell, but rather for a razor-sharp balance of streamlined turn-based battle, catchy tunes, beautiful artwork and a staggering array of multiplayer options for a handheld. Developers Intelligent Systems have been fine-tuning this Japanese series since the era of the NES and it shows. The "sequel" Black Hole Rising relied a little too much on gimmicks but the original is doubtless one of the most engaging and fully featured games ever." **John "Hockey Temper" Dewhurst**

JOHN DEWHURST PROFILE

Favourite game character: Kimahri from FFX. Maybe I'll meet a Tall, Dark Stranger one day.

Favourite boss: Helmet Head from Silent Hill 2... *freaky*

Favourite weapon: Mallow's Cymbals in Mario RPG.

Favourite death: Leisure Suit Larry dying of VD in The Land of the Lounge Lizards?

Favourite system: GBA. With hardware limitations like this, today's developers were able to exercise real creativity.

DANIEL STAINES PROFILE

Favourite game character: Probably Garrett from the Thief games. Gaming could do with a few more cynical, self-serving heroes like him.

Favourite boss: M. Bison. Gotta be M. Bison. He's one of the few fighting game bosses that I don't mind losing to.

Favourite weapon: Dialogue – provided, of course, that it's well written.

Favourite death: Giant Robot Hitler's demise in the original Wolfenstein is absolutely unbeatable as far as videogame deaths go. Aufwiedersehen Eva!

Favourite system: Of all time? I hate to admit it, but my best gaming experiences are generally confined to the PC. The GameCube would be a close second.

WIZBALL

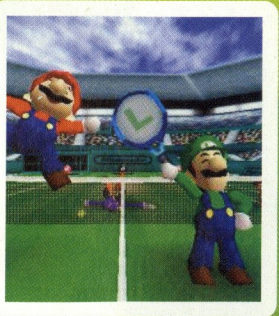
SENSIBLE. C64. 1987

"If there's one thing that emulation has taught me, it's that nostalgia lies. It turns out that a lot of the games that I thought were great 15 years ago are mostly shit. And that's exactly why it was so nice to go back and play Wizball again for this feature. Wizball – amazingly enough – isn't shit. It's actually just as good as I remember it. Some people talk about Rez and Vib Ribbon as if they're the pinnacle of abstract, artistic game design – but, man, Wizball had that stuff beat back in the 80s. With its bizarre, almost beautiful story, unique physics-based gameplay and adorable cabbage protagonist, Wizball is the definition of 'originality'. **Daniel Staines**

MARIO TENNIS

NINTENDO. NINTENDO 64. 2000

You can take your realistic ball physics and licensed players – we'll take Nintendo's stable of characters and awesome multiplayer any day of the week. There are many superlatives that can be used to describe Mario Tennis but the best would have to be addictive. Once you play one game against a mate it takes a very strong will (or some very strong friends who want a go) to stop you from playing another.



JET GRIND RADIO

SMILEBIT. DREAMCAST. 2000

Cel shading is the new lens flare and this is the game that first made it cool – skate around awesome city levels, tag walls, fight cops, bust tricks and listen to an awesome soundtrack comprising the likes of J-Punk Hideki Naganuma, Jurassic 5 and Mix Master Mike. Forget the Xbox sequel Jet Set Radio Future, this is a game worth buying a second hand Dreamcast for.

MIKOLAI PROFILE

Favourite game character: Yoshi. He works as both a videogame character and in plush toy format as an attractive centrepiece for the discerning coffee table.

Favourite boss: Dr Robotnik was always a joy to defeat, possibly because he was a bit crap and easy to get past. Plus it meant that all the fluffy bunny rabbits escaped and jumped around on screen.

Favourite weapon: Weapons are for girls. Real men bounce on people's heads to defeat them. Mario's ass is therefore the greatest weapon in the history of videogames.

Favourite death: Defeating M. Bison in SF2 at the arcades would have to be the greatest death for me. That shit inspired a generation.

Favourite system: Megadrive. Going from a clapped out C64 to a Megadrive made me an instant Sega fanboy. Playing John Madden 92 and the original Sonic as a kid are memories to last you a lifetime.

RAIDEN

SEIBU. ARCADE. 1991

"About a year ago I found myself at what can loosely be described as a retro videogame con. Or some nerds in a club basement listening to bad glitch-hop and showing off their wares. Anyway, someone had brought along their tricked out sit down cabinet complete with every Mame you can imagine. I quickly found the original Raiden and proceeded to impress no less than 3 people by almost, almost, finishing the game on one credit. A combination of booze and more dubious substances giving me super human like reflexes. All those misspent years popping coins into the arcade original had finally paid off. I was King of the nerds…Then I got kicked off the machine and someone decided to play Frogger instead." **Mikolai**

FALLOUT

INTERPLAY. PC. 1997

Any game that can make a nuclear holocaust funny is OK in our books, and Fallout did just that. Aside from being funny, Fallout contained an excellent plot and some of the most solid RPG mechanics seen on the PC. Characters remain hugely customisable even by today's standards and the fighting engine is still hard to top for turn-based/real-time action.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

SEGA. MEGADRIVE. 1991

Sonic may have become a bit of a joke in recent years but when he first roared onto the scene he was amazing. There were two ways to play Sonic the Hedgehog — as a straight platformer or the right way, and by the right way we mean a staggeringly fast twitch masterpiece all about huge jumps, lightning speed and cutting everything close to the wire.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE PROFILE

Favourite game character: The classics. Mario, Ryu, Link, Solid Snake and Samus.

Favourite boss: Psycho Mantis. When he read my mind, I really was thinking about what was on my memory card. Spooky.

Favourite weapon: Apart from the loaded Desert Eagle I keep under my pillow, safety off, I'd have to say Half-Life 2's gravity gun makes the grade. Ragdolling those poor combine grunts was never more fun.

Favourite death: That dude that played 32 hours of Ragnarok and then died. That death was, you know… funny.

Favourite system: I love all my systems, but it just wouldn't be right if I didn't say my Super Nintendo.

DOUBLE DRAGON

TECHNOS. ARCADE. 1987

"The old "machine ate my coin" ruse, you kids today may well scoff at the thought but in the mid to late eighties it was the only way to get free games at your local arcade. With empty pockets and nothing more than a counterfeit tear rolling down my chin I grifted more free games than I care to mention using this coveted technique, and when I ran my ingenious scam I'd inevitably put that free credit on the original scrolling beat 'em up: Taito's Double Dragon. Two dudes using bats and chains to beat up on street punks and women? There really was no better way to spend a childhood." **Maurice Branscombe**

SUPER MARIO KART

NINTENDO. SNES. 1992

There's no denying that at higher levels of AI, the single player game cheats like crazy, but when it comes to multiplayer, Super Mario Kart ranks up there as one of the best games to play with a group of friends and a heap of beer. Unlike most multiplayer games, ALL of the game modes are fun to play, with the hot seat battles standing out as truly brilliant.

NIGHTS

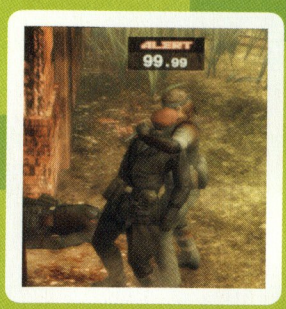
SONIC TEAM. SATURN. 1996

NiGHTS is a strange game to be sure — kind of like a surreal version of Sonic where players fly through rings instead of collecting them. Then you fight bosses and dance. You dance a lot and will get blisters from doing circles on the d-pad but you won't care — you'll be too enchanted by the gameplay, surreal story line and charm of the game.

IKARUGA

TREASURE. DREAMCAST. 2002

Another of the must have games for the Dreamcast. It's a well known fact that Treasure are probably the rockingest developer ever to make a scrolling shooter and as far as we're concerned, Ikaruga is their ultimate game. The white and black switching to absorb enemy shots adds a wonderful tactical layer to the game and makes the boss battles an absolute blast.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3

KONAMI. PS2. 2005

OK, so the incredibly long cutscene at the beginning of the game may mislead you into thinking that you're actually playing a belated sequel to The Bouncer (shudder) but it also gives a great introduction to the subversive sense of humour that runs throughout Snake Eater. Damn it, we want more games where you randomly eat stuff you've slaughtered to see how it tastes.

WONDERBOY IN MONSTER LAND

ESCAPE. ARCADE. 1987

"I was always worried that pressing the pause button 99 times to get a measly sum of coins wasn't worth it. But if I did it enough times at the start of the game I could upgrade and be, well, fully sick. My cheating aside, Wonderboy ML took the leaf-clad youngster from Wonderboy, gave him a sword, a shield and some clothes to go battle evil. While it was still 2D if you took time to explore the various levels of towns you could pick up tips to beat down the bad guys and if you completed certain tasks towards the beginning, you were helped out differently in the final dungeon. If you were lazy and rushed through you had to find your way through the dungeon without help and when I was a wee lad, that was really damn difficult." **Andy 'Butters' Bulmer**

ANDY BULMER PROFILE

Favourite game character:
My WoW Troll priest

Favourite boss:
Hitler, Wolfenstein 3D

Favourite weapon:
Dual silenced PP7

Favourite death:
Any FPS multiplayer sniper head shot.

Favourite system:
Sega Master System

READER'S TOP 50 GAMES

OK, now we've had our say we're sure you're brimming over with righteous indignation that your favourite game wasn't included. Fear not, loyal readers, Issue 146 will feature a Reader's Top 50 – a comprehensive list of the 50 games that you, the readers can't live without. To that end what we need you to do is:

- **List your top 5 games in descending order from 1 to 5**
- **Write approximately 100 words on why you love your number 1 game so much**
- **Send the whole shebang to**

Reader's Top 50
HYPER
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As a little added incentive, contributing to the Reader's Top 50 will put you into the running to win a bunch of games! Get writing.

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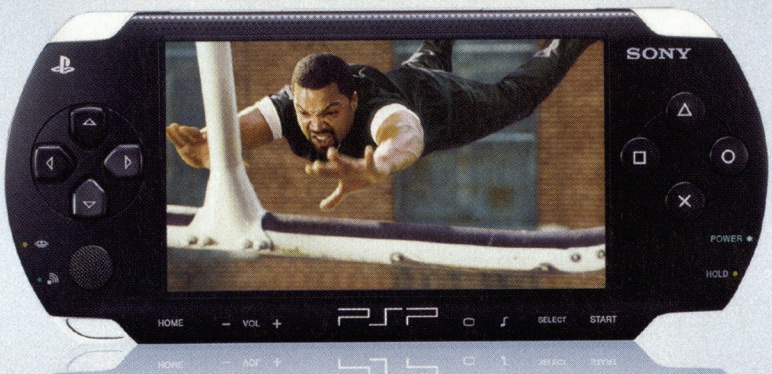

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MASCOTS

MIKOLAI

Mascot. "A person, animal, or object believed to bring good luck, especially one kept as the symbol of an organization." *American Heritage Dictionary.*

Videogame characters have always been an integral part of the industry. From Pac-Man to Master Chief, successful characters have helped elevate games into mainstream consciousness and in the process have become cultural icons in their own right. They've also been big business. Mario almost single handedly gave Nintendo a 90% market share during the 8bit era and Sonic saw Sega go from also ran status to industry leader. But coming up with a successful videogame character isn't easy. In fact, despite over 25 years of games development, the number of characters able to transcend their videogame roots barely breaks double digits. For every Lara Croft or Link, the field is littered with literally hundreds of characters that failed to catch the public's attention. Or just plain sucked. With this is mind, Hyper casts its mind back and looks at the some of worst examples of character design to grace videogames.

PAC-MAN FEVER

The very first videogame characters tended to be simple affairs created around the technical limitations of the host system. After all, a sprite comprised of 6 pixels doesn't allow for a great deal of personality. Still, developers worked with what they had and in Pac-Man, Namco created the world's very first videogame mascot back in 1980. He may have been little more than a yellow circle with a missing pizza slice, but Pac-Man was the first character to capture the public's attention and in the process fill Namco's coffers. It may have been a design fluke, a happy accident if you will, but in creating Pac-Man, Namco inadvertently developed a template that games companies are still trying to emulate – the successful company mascot. A license to print money.

As technology improved, videogame characters slowly began to increase in complexity. It might not seem like much today, but Mario's moustache and red cap were quite revolutionary when he first appeared alongside Donkey Kong in 1981. Sprites and memory were still limited, but the exaggerated moustache ensured Mario had something to distinguish himself from the other stick figures on the market. He wasn't just a sprite you controlled; like Pac-Man before him, Mario took on a life of his own and was soon appearing on school lunch boxes throughout the world. When this was combined with the ground breaking level design and gameplay of Super Mario Bros in 1985, Nintendo had a face and personality to back up its fledgling NES and the console romped it home in the late 80s with international sales of over 60 million.

The golden age of videogame mascots wouldn't, however, arrive until the 16bit era. Having lost the previous generation's console battle against Nintendo, Sega realised that they needed a character to rival Mario in order to sell their new Megadrive system. When Sonic arrived it was the answer to all the company's prayers. Almost overnight, the blue hedgehog took Sega from also ran status to industry leader. Inevitably, a glut of cheap imitations followed as everyone scrambled for a piece of the action.

What the competition largely failed to grasp was that developing a successful mascot took more than just randomly picking an animal and giving them a pair of sunglasses, an attitude and a stupid name. With the exception of Sonic, almost every character to achieve mainstream success was brought about through a combination of luck and timing rather than a marketing committee. Still, this didn't stop the likes of Acclaim, Sunsoft, Hudson and virtually everyone else from having a shot at it.

As platform games became the standard in the early 90s, the shelves were flooded with ill-conceived characters and a lot of the names on this list come from that era - Bubsy the Bobcat being one of the most cynical examples of the industry's attempts to cash in on the success of Mario and Sonic. The fact that virtually all of these characters disappeared just as quickly as they had been rushed into the market speaks volumes about the quality of both the games and the characters attached to them.

As the games industry entered yet another generation and Sony began to dominate the market, the platformers of old gradually began to lose their clout. Sony may have scooped up Crash Bandicoot as an unofficial mascot for the PSone but in many ways he was a

throwback to the 16bit era and failed to make much impact outside videogames. The first character to successfully connect with the new, older demographic that Sony were courting would be a busty adventurer named Lara Croft.

The success of Lara gave the world its first, true, videogame idol since the rise of Sonic and in the process turned character design on its head. Not only was the game's protagonist a woman, but she was a fully 3D modelled character with ample breasts and tight clothing. This was quite unlike anything that had been seen in videogames before and perfectly encapsulated the changes taking place in the positioning of consoles. Not that anyone at the time could have predicted the eventually popularity of Lara. Like the best mascots, Lara somehow managed to tap into the popular consciousness by being the right character in the right place at the right time. No one was more surprised by her success than Core Designs themselves, although they laughed all the way to the bank once she started appearing on the cover of The Face and other international magazines.

Lara ushered in a new era of videogames and since then character design has undergone a massive transformation. As the videogames industry has matured and graphics have become more realistic, the focus has shifted away from creating cartoon mascots in favour of gritty realism. Think Grand Theft Auto rather than hedgehogs. Throw in the rise of the FPS, where you might never see your character, and the mascot isn't what it used to be. This is a trend that isn't likely to change with the new generation of consoles soon to be launched.

While Japanese developers continue to create original, cartoon-based characters, e.g. Billy Hatcher, the reality is Japan's games no longer dominate the industry the way they used to. Instead, the influx of what is commonly referred to as 'casual' gamers, the associated expansion of the market and the rise of Western games development has seen companies re-evaluate their approach to character and art design yet again. To put it simply, photo realism has become the rallying cry and the idea of a carton mascot has largely been forgotten. Which in many ways is a shame, after all, who has more personality, CJ from San Adreas or Dante from the Devil May Cry series? Still, I suppose it's a lot easier to design a bland but photo realistic human character then it is to come up with something as charming as a Yoshi.

THE 25 WORST VIDEOGAME CHARACTERS OF ALL TIME

In coming up with this list, Hyper took a number of factors into consideration. Some of the characters here have been included because it's obvious they were designed by committee, others simply added nothing to videogaming as a whole. Still others appeared in what were reasonable games at the time, but for one reason or another just annoyed the hell out of us. The one thing all the characters have in common, however, is a distinct lack of charm and the almost universal scorn of the videogame community. Many of the characters included went on to star in a number of sequels on multiple platforms so for simplicity's sake we've just listed the platform(s) on which they made their howlingly unfunny debut. Suggestions for characters we missed and spirited defenses of characters that we didn't should be sent to the usual address.

RAD TO THE MAX!

1 BUBSY THE BOBCAT

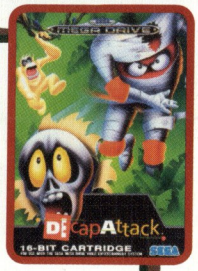
ACCOLADE ■ MEGADRIVE, SNES

■ This was Accolade's big attempt to cash in on the mascot hysteria of the 16bit era. It failed. Bubsy was a charmless mess. A 'bobcat with attitude', he traversed sideways scrolling levels collecting hairballs and made little children cry in frustration. Despite this, for about two weeks back in 1993, Bubsy was big news. He made the cover of P.R. mouthpiece EGM and received half decent reviews. So what did Accolade do? In typical fashion, they produced a sequel even worse than the original. Thankfully this finished the bobcat's career.

2 GEX

CRYSTAL DYNAMICS ■ 3DO

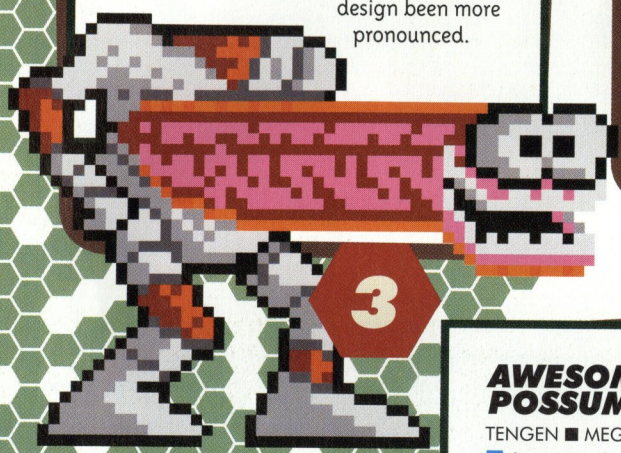
■ Let's see, stupid grin. Check. Sunglasses. Check. Bad Attitude. Check. No personality at all. Check. Whoever designed Gex needs to die. Sorry. Only the most evil bastard would inflict this upon the world for commercial profit. Damn shame he's such a smug looking little git too, as the original 3DO game wasn't too bad, nor were the sequels.



CHUCK D. HEAD. (DECAP ATTACK)

SEGA ■ MEGADRIVE

■ In Japan this was released as Magical Flying Hats Turbo Adventure. (best. name. ever.) It featured a kid that kinda looked like the original Prince of Persia (if you squinted) and it was great. Actually, I think it was an update of Psycho Fox on the Master System (also great). Anyway, the bastardised Western version of the game replaced all this with a character that resembled a walking design black hole. Sure it still played the same, but the level of incompetence present in the Western art direction was enough to turn everyone but the blind off. Never has the contrast between Japanese and Western concepts of character design been more pronounced.



3

CRASH BANDICOOT

NAUGHTY DOG ■ PSONE

■ Just look at that gurning face! That's not the face of a friendly videogame character, that's the face of a speed freak on no sleep. Make it stop! Naughty Dog hit the jackpot with this guy, as Crash was a huge success and quickly became the PlayStation's unofficial mascot. The original game wasn't too bad either. It was a throwback to the carefully planned platform design of the 8 and 16bit eras, only in 3D. But then there was a sequel, and another, and another. What was initially moderately charming quickly turned into flogging a dead horse. Just let him die already! One of our favourite videogame characters Parappa said it best in the pages of Edge Magazine when he quipped, "Sorry Crash, but no one actually likes you here in Japan". Not many people like him in the West either.

5

4

AWESOME POSSUM

TENGEN ■ MEGADRIVE

■ Awesome Possum looks like he was designed by someone who woke up one morning and decided that they could draw. The results are not unlike you waking up one morning and deciding you're going to build a nuclear reactor. As Mean Machines magazine would have phrased it back in the day, "A shambling mockery of a sad mess of a debacle". Rampant drug abuse may have been involved in conceiving Awesome Possum. Seriously. Oh, and if you care, this was another random platformer released during the 16bit era.

6

PEPSI MAN

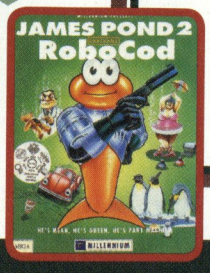
KID ■ PSONE

■ Surely there should be some sort of law against this? Even McDonalds and 7-Up had the decency to create some lame characters to flog their products. Not Pepsi. "So Ted, what shall we call this new character we've been commissioned to design by Pepsi?" "How about we call him Pepsi Man". "Brilliant, let's go sell crack to school kids". Although Pepsi Man was meant to be some kind of hero, he had all the personality of a dead fish and starred in a game where you collected cans of Pepsi, listened to a song that just looped "Pepsi Maaaaaan, Pepsi Maaaaaan" over and over again, and objectives that exclusively required you to get Pepsi to extremely thirsty people. So awful it's funny.

JAMES POND

EA ■ AMIGA

■ "So okay, the main character is like a cross between a fish and James Bond. James Pond! Get It!? Huh!? Huh!? Oh shit, I think I just burst a blood vessel laughing. Quick someone call a doctor." Yes. Quite. James Pond stared in a number of platform games on the Megadrive and several offshoot projects but he originally began life on the Amiga. The games press want crazy about the second James Pond game, Robocod (groan), but looking back now, it's hard to see why. The levels may have been massive but they were terminally bland, James Pond played like virtually every other platformer around and, when all is said and done, the name James Pond: Robocod must surely rank up there as one of the worst puns ever.



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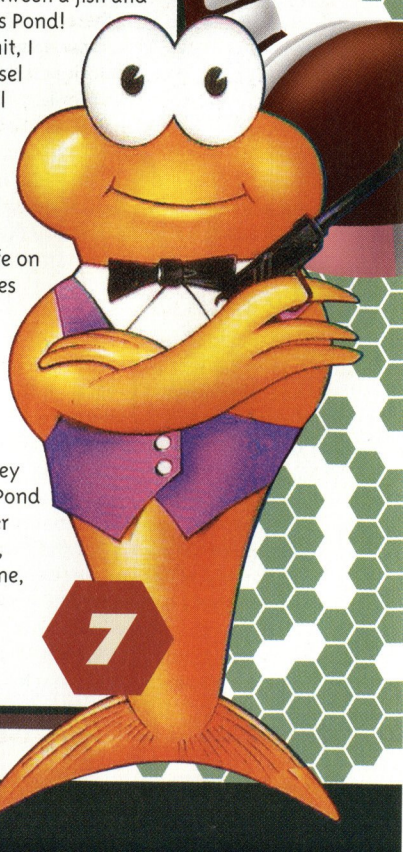


8 RASCAL

PYSGNOSIS ■ PSONE

■ I guess the market for 'animals with attitude' had been saturated by the time Rascal came along and the developers thought the next logical progression in the world of mascots was a toddler with attitude instead. FYI, we know he has attitude because he's wearing sunglasses. What does the game itself play like? Well no one really knows since this disappeared from retail shelves almost as soon as it had appeared. Perhaps all the copies were buried in the desert next to the Atari 2600 ET cartridges.

9 HORACE

MELBOURNE HOUSE

PSION ■ SPECTRUM

■ Horace has no head. Even by Spectrum standards this seems like a cheap and patronising way to design a character. Granted 48k isn't a lot of memory, but most games released on the Spectrum managed to incorporate things like arms and legs on their characters. Shit, you could find a reasonable conversion of Chase HQ on the Spectrum. Not pretty, mind. But it did the job. And while we're putting the boot in, surely a game based upon downhill skiing requires a character with like, you know, eyes. Whoever designed this was either lazy or stupid. Possibly both.

10 CHESTER CHEETAH

KANECO ■ MEGADRIVE, SNES

■ You like corn chips right? Of course you do, everyone does. Does that mean you want to play a game staring Doritos Chester Cheetah? Er, no. Turning corporate mascots into videogames is as fundamentally flawed as mixing orange juice and milk and Chester Cheetah is one of the worst examples. He even has sunglasses! Bah.

11 ZOOL

GREMLIN ■ AMIGA

■ Zool was originally designed for the Amiga as an answer to Sonic and Mario. Only he sucked harder than anyone has ever sucked before. I think he was supposed to be a super ant, or an alien ninja or something. No one knows. While Zool received praise from the media upon release, this had more to do with the Amiga's lack of decent platformers then the quality of the game. By the time the sorry mess was ported across to home consoles, Sonic and Mario World had been and gone and Zool looked like an archaic nod to how things used to be done. If that wasn't bad enough, one of the game's levels was sponsored by Chompa Chomps. Horrible.

12 GENERAL CUSTER

MYSTIQUE ■ ATARI 2600

■ Going around raping Native American women tied to cacti is not cool. Nor does it make for a likable videogame character. Not that it stopped a U.S. game developer from doing exactly that. See general Custer in all his 6-pixel glory as he jerks [across the screen] from left to right, finds an Indian girl and rapes her. We're not making this up. Political correctness was yet to manifest itself in Western society when this was released but even so, the idea of releasing this to the public defies logic and taste.

13 GLOVER

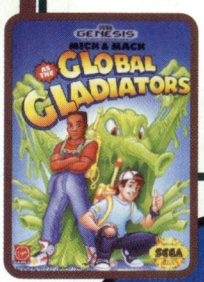
HASBRO ■ N64

■ Everyone loves gloves right? They keep your hands warm in the winter and like, you can drive with them on and stuff. Whoa! Let's design a videogame character but we'll make him a glove!! Ah the horror. By the time this was released companies were desperately looking at cheap gimmicks to make their platformers stand out and this was scraping the bottom of the barrel. The fact that Glover looked incredibly effeminate probably didn't help his cause either. Cue a million terrible jokes about gloves and giving men 'a hand'... sorry. Surely someone lost their job over this?

14 MICK N MACK

VIRGIN ■ MEGADRIVE, SNES

■ Do you really want to play through a glorified piece of McDonalds propaganda about saving the environment? No. How about we throw in Mick n Mack to sweeten the deal? Hmmm, still no? In case you don't know, Mick n Mack was actually developed by Treasure, yes, that's the same Treasure that did Ikaruga and Radiant Silvergun. Which just makes it all the more baffling. Maybe they needed the money? Like Krusty once said, "I'm only human. They showed up at my house with a truck full of money".



16 MASTER HIGGINS

HUDSON ■ NES

■ Granted, the original Wonderboy sprite wasn't great. But that doesn't explain how Hudson managed to take an already questionable character and make it even worse. Master Higgins was in fact based on a Japanese games champion named Tikashi who from all accounts was a fat bastard. He attained cult like status and as a thank you Hudson created the Master Higgins character in his likeness for their Wonderboy rip offs – the Adventure Island series. Which just goes to show why overweight, middle aged Japanese men should not star in videogames...even if they do wear a baseball cap.

15 AERO THE ACROBAT

SUNSOFT ■ MEGADRIVE, SNES

■ See what we wrote about Bubsy the Bobcat elsewhere in this piece? Well replace Bobcat with 'Fruitbat' and the exact same thing applies. This was Sunsoft's (perennial also rans) attempt at a mascot and just like Bubsy, Aero received the front cover treatment from EGM. Also like Bubsy, the hastily rehashed sequel saw Aero pensioned off and Sunsoft disappear into obscurity.

17 CALIFORNIA RAISONS

CAPCOM ■ NES

■ No, we're not making this one up either. Back in 1991 the California Raisons company decided they wanted to appeal to a youth market and make raisons seem cool – so kids would stop discarding the packets they found placed in their lunch boxes by health conscious parents. What better way to make the kids California Raisins!!!pwns!!!eleven!. Unfortunately it didn't work. For some reasons a sideways scrolling platformer extolling the virtues of a healthy diet staring a raison didn't capture the youth of America's imagination.

ROLO THE ELEPHANT

EA ■ MEGADRIVE

■ Er, no. Sorry, but a videogame character based on a camp German cartoon just isn't going to cut it. Especially when said character is an overweight elephant with rosy cheeks and eyeliner. In case you care, this was yet another platformer and was released by EA. Anyway, design wise this wasn't too bad, it featured nearly 100 levels and if for some reason you felt compelled to obsessively finish every sideways scroller ever released then you could do much worse. Still, you're controlling a gay elephant. There's no getting around it. And kids can be so cruel.

18 TEDDY BOY

SEGA ■ MASTER SYSTEM

■ According to Wilks, The Teddy Boys were a notorious London gang in the 1960s. Somehow, I don't think they have much to do with this early Master System release from Sega. Instead we have Teddy Boy, for it is he, transversing some single screen platform action while shooting blobs. Fair enough, this was released in the mid 80s. But why call it Teddy Boy? I suppose it could mean something different in Japan. Maybe Teddy Boy means 'super hard gun boy' over there. If that's the case, then perhaps a title change would have been appropriate before the Western release. As it stands though, Teddy Boy comes from another era in videogames - a simpler time when characters could have patently inappropriate names and no one felt weird or awkward about it.

20 WALUIGI

NINTENDO ■ N64

■ When it comes to designing memorable videogame characters Nintendo are unparalleled. With Mario, Pokemon, Wario, Link and Donkey Kong on their books, Nintendo's intellectual property alone is worth the economy of several small countries. Still, that doesn't mean they always get it right. Rarely however, have they got it more wrong than Waluigi. The problem is that Luigi himself has never been that popular and creating a shadow Luigi just reinforces this. In fact the whole thing smacks of making up the numbers for the Mario Party and sports titles. Playing as Waluigi is like being the last picked on the sports team at lunch break, i.e. not good.

21 ERNEST EVANS

RENOVATION ■ MEGADRIVE, MEGA CD

■ Can you imagine being called Ernest Evans and not getting beat up at school every day? No, me neither. Anyway, this was one of the first games to appear for the Mega CD and as such, it wasn't very good. Basically this was another platform game with a few nice cinema intermissions thrown in to justify the format and a character who wished he was Indiana Jones. Still, even if the game had been brilliant, there's no getting around the fact that someone thought Ernest Evans was an appropriate name for a videogame character.

22 COOL SPOT

VIRGIN ■ MEGADRIVE, SNES

■ When is a 7-Up advertisement not an advertisement? When you the company involved is forced to remove all reference to the beverage from the game. That leaves you with a red dot and um, not much else. The press loved this game upon its release and to be honest, it wasn't bad. It certainly looked lovely and played well. Still, there's no getting around the fact the game stared a red spot with arms and legs.

23 B.O.B.

EA ■ MEGADRIVE

■ "B.O.B is an action platform game where you play a teenage robot in his father's space car going to his date but unfortunately you crash the space and so you have to travel through the levels to find the portal and get to the car at the end of all of them." [As taken from the blurb on the back of the box] I think that says it all. What's that, you inexplicably want to know more? Okay, this was yet another platformer released by EA on the Megadrive. Oh, and B.O.B. makes C3Po look like the definition of masculinity.

24 BONK

HUDSON ■ PC ENGINE

■ The general consensus in the early 90s was that a videogame console couldn't succeed without a mascot of some sort. Nintendo had Mario, Sega had Sonic and Hudson / N.E.C. had, er, Bonk. Originally known as PC Kid in Japan, the character was rechristened Bonk for the U.S. market and the launch of the Turbo Grafx. Despite the games being quite fun, the bald caveman never enjoyed the same success as his rivals and was largely written off as just another platform character. Still, the name Bonk did allow for some unintentionally smutty humour, like the U.S. advertisements that screamed, "Bonk 'em hard, bonk 'em fast". Oh dear.

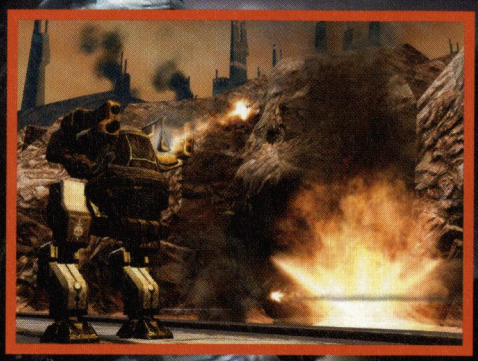
25 SPYRO:

SONY ■ PSONE

■ To be fair, Spyro was always aimed at a younger demographic. After all, 8 year olds probably like purple dragons that do cute dragon like things. The games may have been solid platform affairs but what about the rest of us? Maybe if they had replaced Spyro with Puff the Magic Dragon this would have been better. After all, a videogame in which the main protagonist 'blazes mad erb', watches bad television, orders pizza, laughs at nothing for 5 minutes and then eats a block of Cabury choclate on their own would have broken down cultural barriers. Sadly, that game is yet to be made and it's unlikely it would ever see a release date in Oz anyway.

Activision Activate Asia 2005

Maurice Branscombe gets Hyper Activated in Hong Kong.



QUAKE 4. Raven Software. PC, Xbox 360

When all's said and done Quake 4 was the biggest game at Activate 2005. CEO of id Software Todd Hollenshead and id's lead designer Tim Willets flew all the way to Hong Kong to show us their latest project, and even though long-time collaborators Raven Software are handling the development side of Quake 4, Willits and Hollenshead both assured us that they're keeping a close eye on their baby, and partnering heavily with Raven on the game's design. Furthermore Todd and Tim both promised us emphatically that Quake 4 would indeed be the best in the series so far. With that they jumped straight into a play through of a few of the game's initial moments, beginning with the game's opening credits where dead soldiers float through the void of space, with our gaze eventually settling on a fleet of orbiting battleships. The ship's commander fills you in on the events of Quake 2, the death of the Macron, from which the story of Q4 continues directly, but before you know it you have crash-landed on the planet below. Bad luck for you that the planet is Stroggos.

Visually the game is stunning, but even if you didn't already know that Q4 was built on id's own Doom 3 engine, upon viewing the game - you'd know. While not identical the two games share so many graphical nuances that examining Q4 without making constant comparisons is almost impossible. Upon analysis however it is also obvious that Q4 is superior in every respect. Significant improvements include the use of more outdoor battlegrounds to banish the memory of Doom 3's endless corridors, as well as the inclusion of numerous vehicles including mechs and hover tanks to use against the Strogg. Then there's also the mid-game "twist" announced at this year's E3, with the player finding themselves captured by the Strogg and systematically transformed into a half-man, half-machine, which may yet open up many interesting gameplay possibilities.

Multiplayer details were thin on the ground but Hollenshead and Willits assured us that Quake 4's multiplayer would be to QIII: Arena what Q4's single player is to Quake 2...

THE MOVIES. Lionhead Studios. PC, PS2, Xbox

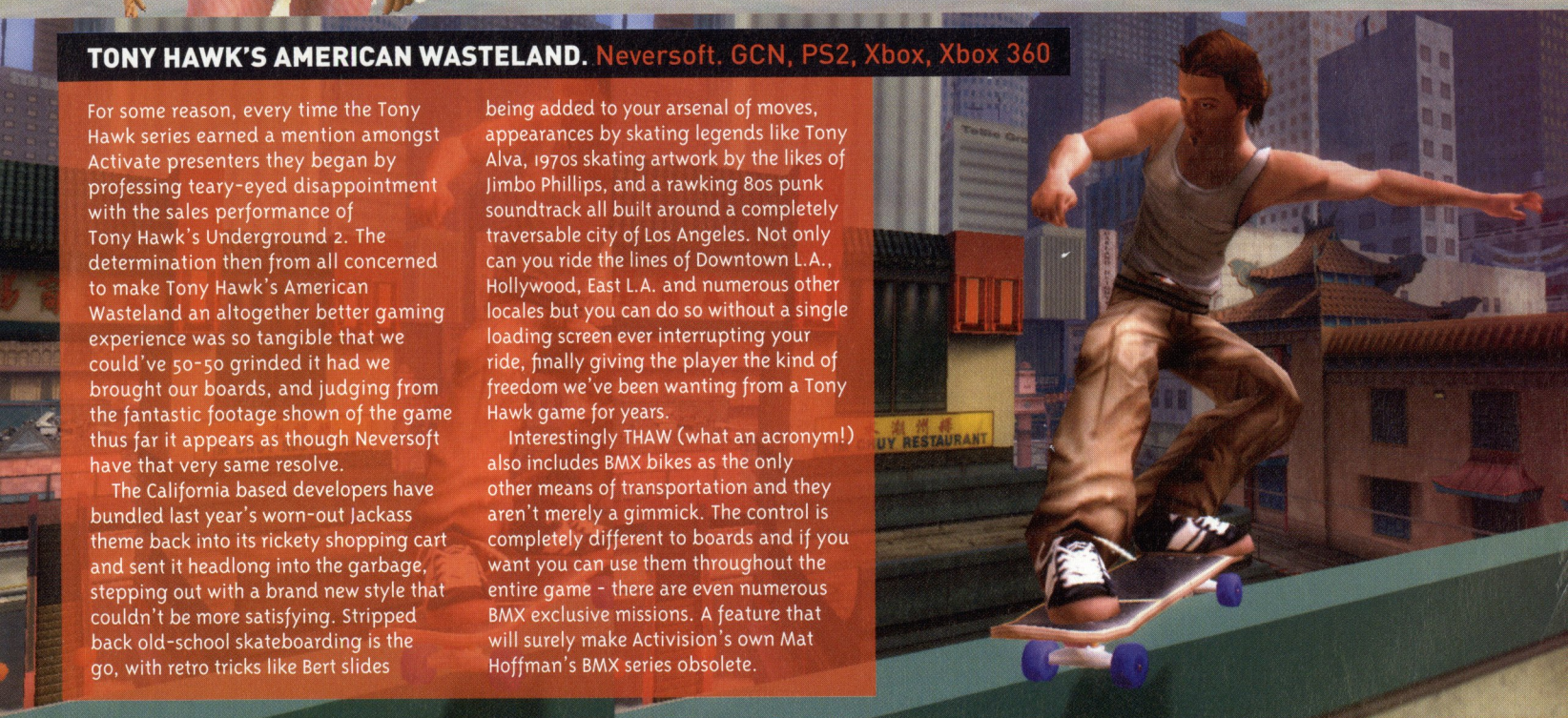
Most of the press in the audience had seen a presentation of The Movies at least once every year since the game's unveiling in 2002. Even so, as the release date finally draws near it was very easy indeed to get piss-your-pants excited about the prospect of commanding your own cinematic empire, building the studio, hiring the writers, actors and directors, shooting the films and taking them to box office success. We were told that over the past couple of months an entirely new interface has been implemented in the game; there are no more menu boxes, and instead it has been streamlined into an intuitive drag and drop style interface where simply dropping an employee into the desired room of a building will issue all your commands. One of the funniest new features shown at Activate was the introduction of manipulatable Paparazzo. If your actor's star is waning, just get them in a compromising situation and send a press photographer in to capture the shameful event. Before you know it the public will be screaming for them, and your next movie may well be a hit. Other great moments included the creation of a Peter Molyneux look-alike actor with the game's "Starmaker" tool, and casting him in a fistfight scene in a burning subway, as well as the screening of a couple of movies made in-game including a pretty hilarious Zombie-Musical where the undead danced away to the tune of "I will Survive".

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND. Neversoft. GCN, PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360

For some reason, every time the Tony Hawk series earned a mention amongst Activate presenters they began by professing teary-eyed disappointment with the sales performance of Tony Hawk's Underground 2. The determination then from all concerned to make Tony Hawk's American Wasteland an altogether better gaming experience was so tangible that we could've 50-50 grinded it had we brought our boards, and judging from the fantastic footage shown of the game thus far it appears as though Neversoft have that very same resolve.

The California based developers have bundled last year's worn-out Jackass theme back into its rickety shopping cart and sent it headlong into the garbage, stepping out with a brand new style that couldn't be more satisfying. Stripped back old-school skateboarding is the go, with retro tricks like Bert slides being added to your arsenal of moves, appearances by skating legends like Tony Alva, 1970s skating artwork by the likes of Jimbo Phillips, and a rawking 80s punk soundtrack all built around a completely traversable city of Los Angeles. Not only can you ride the lines of Downtown L.A., Hollywood, East L.A. and numerous other locales but you can do so without a single loading screen ever interrupting your ride, finally giving the player the kind of freedom we've been wanting from a Tony Hawk game for years.

Interestingly THAW (what an acronym!) also includes BMX bikes as the only other means of transportation and they aren't merely a gimmick. The control is completely different to boards and if you want you can use them throughout the entire game - there are even numerous BMX exclusive missions. A feature that will surely make Activision's own Mat Hoffman's BMX series obsolete.

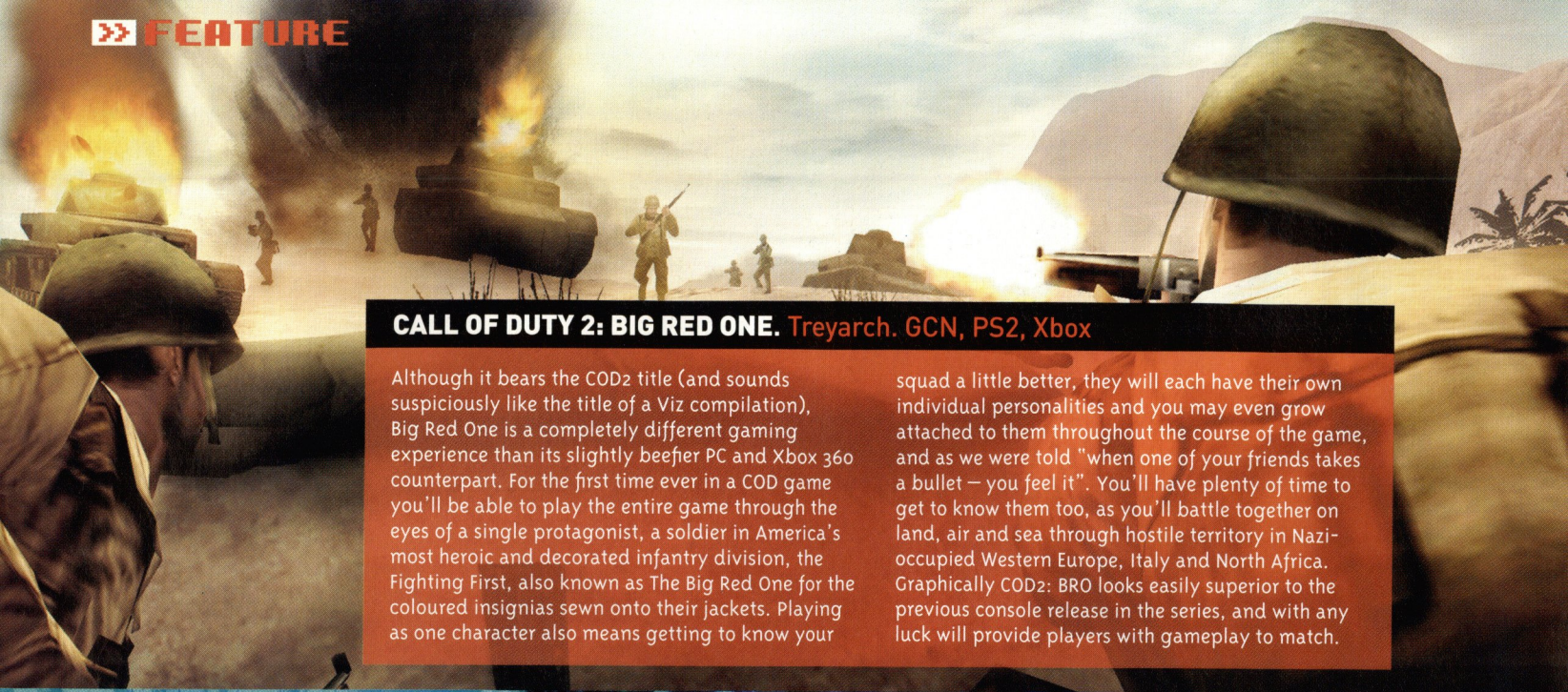


TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY. Luxaflux. GCN, PS2, Xbox

The original True Crime was an ambitious endeavour putting you in the shoes of an L.A. cop on the beat, and while it was flawed it provided an adequate counter-reality to the criminal-centric Grand Theft Auto series.

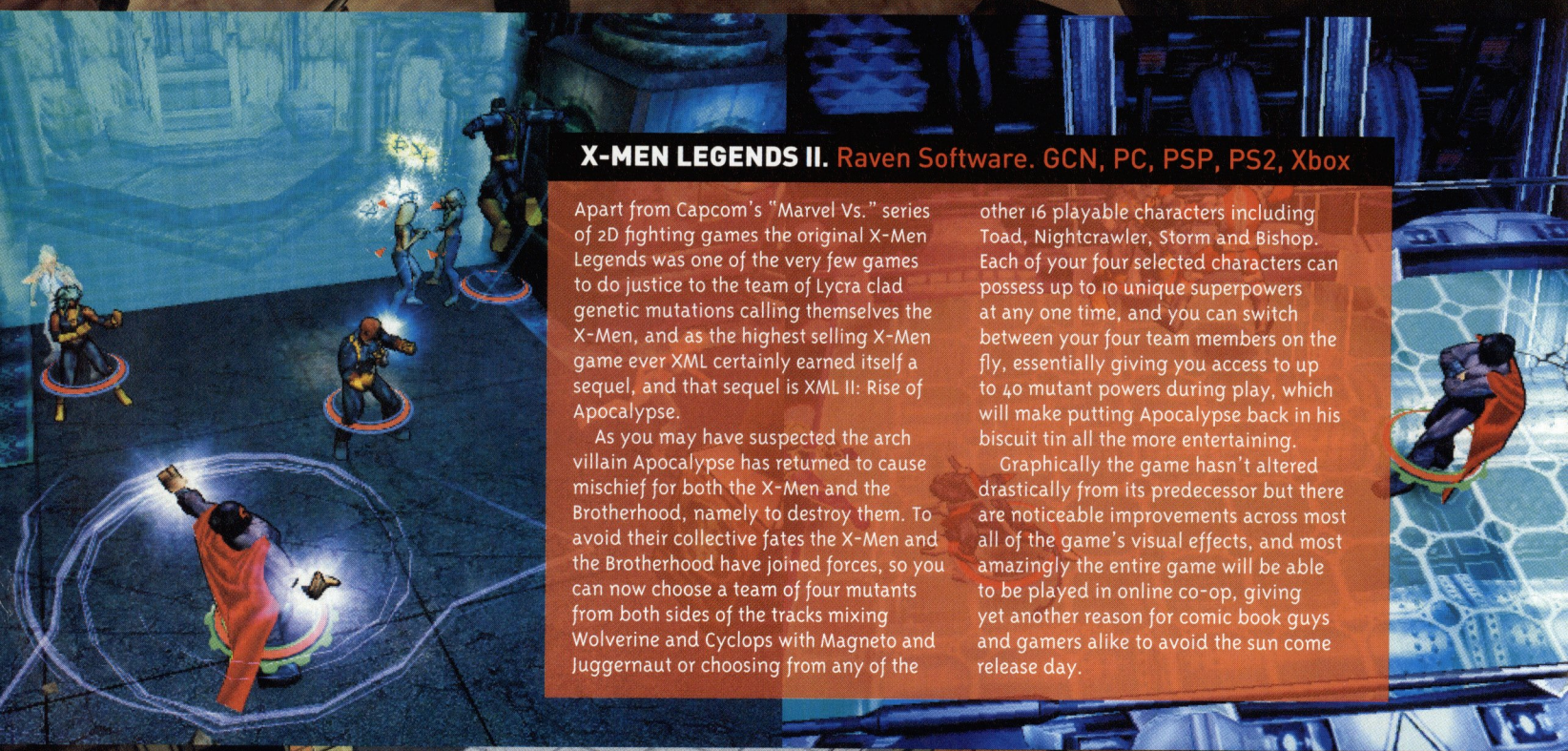
Promising to improve their game to no end for True Crime: New York City, this time Luxaflux have given players the entire island of Manhattan to protect and serve, with each of the city's streets recreated from pinpoint accurate GPS data. Authentic representations of landmark New York sites and buildings like Times Square and the Empire State, as well as a precise and fully workable replica of the New York subway system will help to immerse the player in the game's world in ways that the previous True Crime didn't come close to. The demonstration of Time Square in particular looked phenomenal. The towering billboards and searing neons blazed their way through the night while a selection of the game's choicest weather effects were displayed for us on the fly, ranging from pouring rain to falling snow. Against this fitting backdrop we were given a look at the game's new protagonist, Marcus Reed, a badass ex-crim-turned-cop. Walking on both sides of the law comes easy to Marcus, and as we were shown there are many more consequences to choosing the path of good or bad cop. Good deeds will visibly improve the neighbourhood's quality of life, crime will be down, the streets will be clean and the citizens will be happy. If however you fancy yourself as the bad cop, gangs will proliferate and street violence will be way up.

Vastly improved driving, fisticuffs and gun fighting gameplay were also promised, making True Crime: New York City a definite watcher.



CALL OF DUTY 2: BIG RED ONE. Treyarch. GCN, PS2, Xbox

Although it bears the COD2 title (and sounds suspiciously like the title of a Viz compilation), Big Red One is a completely different gaming experience than its slightly beefier PC and Xbox 360 counterpart. For the first time ever in a COD game you'll be able to play the entire game through the eyes of a single protagonist, a soldier in America's most heroic and decorated infantry division, the Fighting First, also known as The Big Red One for the coloured insignias sewn onto their jackets. Playing as one character also means getting to know your squad a little better, they will each have their own individual personalities and you may even grow attached to them throughout the course of the game, and as we were told "when one of your friends takes a bullet – you feel it". You'll have plenty of time to get to know them too, as you'll battle together on land, air and sea through hostile territory in Nazi-occupied Western Europe, Italy and North Africa. Graphically COD2: BRO looks easily superior to the previous console release in the series, and with any luck will provide players with gameplay to match.

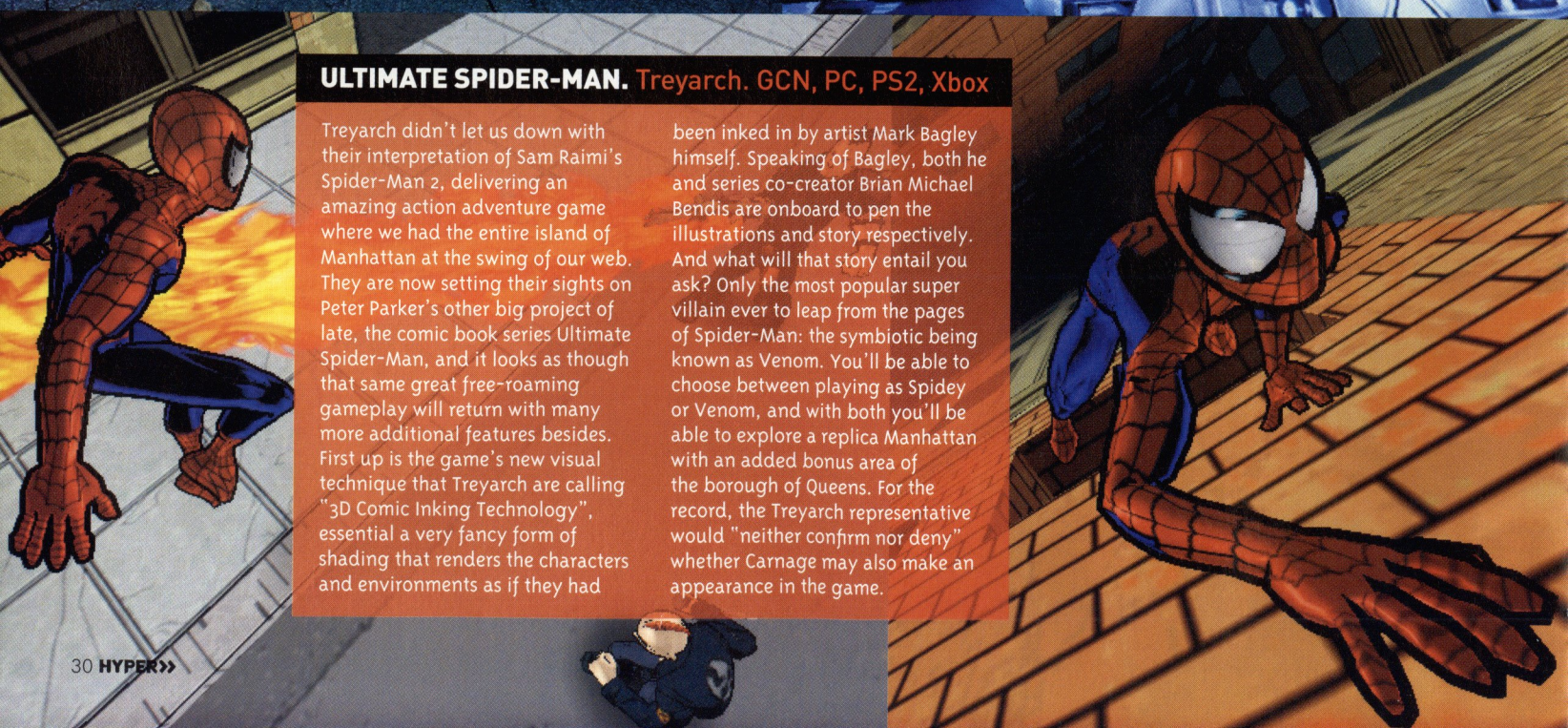


X-MEN LEGENDS II. Raven Software. GCN, PC, PSP, PS2, Xbox

Apart from Capcom's "Marvel Vs." series of 2D fighting games the original X-Men Legends was one of the very few games to do justice to the team of Lycra clad genetic mutations calling themselves the X-Men, and as the highest selling X-Men game ever XML certainly earned itself a sequel, and that sequel is XML II: Rise of Apocalypse.

As you may have suspected the arch villain Apocalypse has returned to cause mischief for both the X-Men and the Brotherhood, namely to destroy them. To avoid their collective fates the X-Men and the Brotherhood have joined forces, so you can now choose a team of four mutants from both sides of the tracks mixing Wolverine and Cyclops with Magneto and Juggernaut or choosing from any of the other 16 playable characters including Toad, Nightcrawler, Storm and Bishop. Each of your four selected characters can possess up to 10 unique superpowers at any one time, and you can switch between your four team members on the fly, essentially giving you access to up to 40 mutant powers during play, which will make putting Apocalypse back in his biscuit tin all the more entertaining.

Graphically the game hasn't altered drastically from its predecessor but there are noticeable improvements across most all of the game's visual effects, and most amazingly the entire game will be able to be played in online co-op, giving yet another reason for comic book guys and gamers alike to avoid the sun come release day.



ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN. Treyarch. GCN, PC, PS2, Xbox

Treyarch didn't let us down with their interpretation of Sam Raimi's Spider-Man 2, delivering an amazing action adventure game where we had the entire island of Manhattan at the swing of our web. They are now setting their sights on Peter Parker's other big project of late, the comic book series Ultimate Spider-Man, and it looks as though that same great free-roaming gameplay will return with many more additional features besides. First up is the game's new visual technique that Treyarch are calling "3D Comic Inking Technology", essential a very fancy form of shading that renders the characters and environments as if they had been inked in by artist Mark Bagley himself. Speaking of Bagley, both he and series co-creator Brian Michael Bendis are onboard to pen the illustrations and story respectively. And what will that story entail you ask? Only the most popular super villain ever to leap from the pages of Spider-Man: the symbiotic being known as Venom. You'll be able to choose between playing as Spidey or Venom, and with both you'll be able to explore a replica Manhattan with an added bonus area of the borough of Queens. For the record, the Treyarch representative would "neither confirm nor deny" whether Carnage may also make an appearance in the game.

CALL OF DUTY 2. Infinity Ward. PC, Xbox 360

If you think you've seen every possible variation on the D-Day landings at Normandy, Call of Duty 2 will prove you wrong. In one of the most impressive feats of design seen at this year's Activate, Infinity Ward presented their breathtaking recreation of the battle at Pointe du Hoc, where U.S. Rangers had to climb the cliffs to get to the enemy guns that were raining down lead onto that same beach that we've trudged across many times before. Being faced with a sheer rock face with an armada of Nazi troops firing from above is both spectacular and intimidating, just as it should be, and if the game's other levels, set in Russia, North Africa and Egypt among others, have just a little of that initial level's drama, we'll be in for one hell of a ride. Graphically the game is amazingly realistic, and upon reflection the one thing that really blew us away about Call of Duty 2 was the absolutely unbelievable smoke effects. The billowing grey and black plumes rise up from shell hits and grenade explosions and spiral towards the sky in a more realistic and dynamic manner than we've ever seen before, ensuring that come its release day the award of Best. Smoke. Ever. will undoubtedly rest with COD2.

GUN. Neversoft. GCN, PC, PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360

As the lights dimmed and the presentation for Neversoft's latest game GUN began we didn't quite know what to expect, but we knew we wanted to like it. The lawless West is the perfect setting for a game, yet so few have attempted the concept, let alone conquered it. Opening with iconic images of the Wild West, the voice of Colton White, GUN's main character as voiced by the gravel throated Tom Jane (The Punisher), tells us the game's story of vengeful justice. Although Colton's motivations are unclear at this stage the revenge tale has been penned by screenwriter Randall Johnson (The Mask of Zorro), so we should expect something a cut above the typical "you killed my pa!" storyline. Regardless, the game will feature gun slinging in an expansive free-roaming world, and a non-linear mission structure similar to some of Neversoft's most recent games, although definitely without the skateboards. Various sub-missions and other fun distractions will also be included including hunting elk or buffalo, gambling, gold prospecting, cattle herding, bounty killing, and seemingly unlimited others. As the first non-Tony Hawk game that Neversoft have turned their hand at in quite some time there's a lot riding on GUN's success, and so far it looks to be dead on target.

HAY 'N GRAY

MARC ECKŌ'S **getting up**
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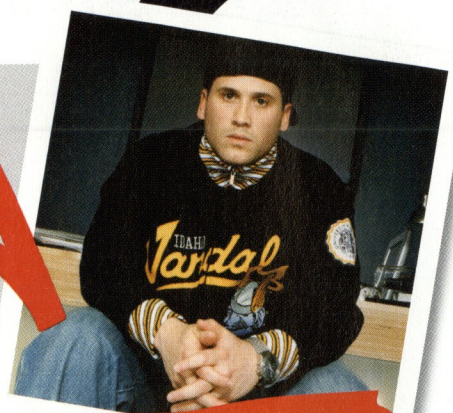


AN INTERVIEW WITH MARC ECKO

CAN GETTING UP BE BOTH A GREAT GAME AND AN AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION OF GRAFFITI CULTURE? MARC ECKO TELLS US HOW...

Tell us a little bit about New Radius - what kind of world is Getting Up set in?

Marc Ecko: New Radius is this kind of alternative universe set 15 minutes into the future. Aesthetically, the city is a blend of the cultural and architectural details of New York mixed with Kowloon, Hong Kong. It's a very vertical city, the perfect place for the game's lead character, Trane, to defy gravity and get his message up.

New Radius is not very friendly to Trane and other graf artists. It's a city caught in the strangle hold of a corrupt Mayor and his Civil Conduct Keepers, with graf artists pegged as public enemies number one under an urban renewal project called "Revive, Rebuild, Renew."

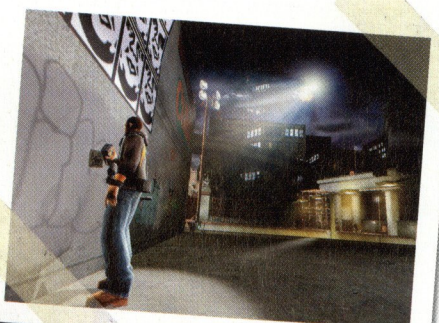
The game is very much a homage to graffiti culture. What are the advantages of setting the game in a fictional location? Why not just set it in New York? Then you could have Smith's famous Brooklyn Bridge throw up and other historic pieces...

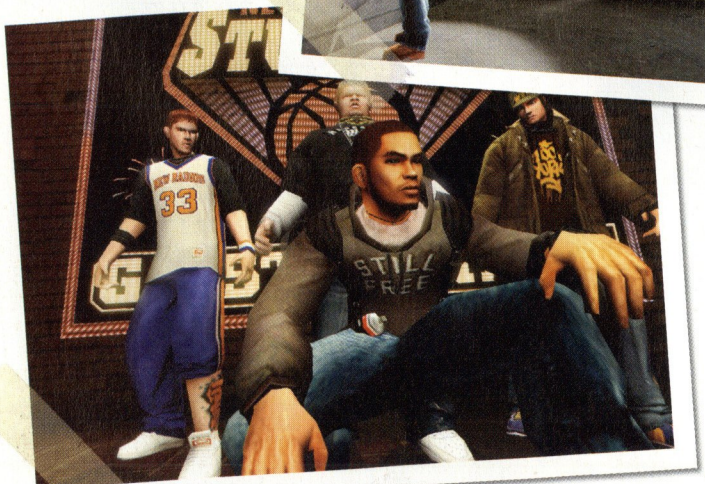
It's been done so many times. You can't recreate New York, you can only visit. New Radius is a part of the fiction. I wanted a setting that faintly smelled like New York City, but was also just a bit off. It's familiar, but also slightly futuristic, asking what would happen if an urban renewal program went terribly wrong.

What are the parallels between Trane's journey in New Radius and the evolution of graffiti culture in New York in the 80s?

At the end of the day, this is the ultimate course in graf 101. We teamed with approximately 65 writers to make sure the game was an authentic representation of their art and the risks they go through to get their voices heard, as well as six legends like Cope2 and Futura who are actually characters in the game and help Trane advance his skills and reputation. You begin your journey underground in a level called "Before They Were Silver, We Were Gold," a direct tribute to New York City's old Redbird and Bluebird trains before the buffers came along and put an end to the whole train throwups so prevalent back in the day.

THE GRAFFITI LEGENDS





What will Trane need to do to become "All City King", and how will he set the city free?

The goal of the game is to increase Trane's rep by successfully completing his graffiti objectives and to take him from the status of a Toy, or beginner, to Legend. In the beginning, Trane is only thinking about "ME," rolling solo and getting a personal high by tagging his name around the city. As the game progresses, he uncovers some very personal truths about the government and must put his skills and athleticism to the test in order to expose the corruption and possibly change the world.

You've recruited six of the all time graffiti greats to be mentors to Trane in the game - tell us about the role they'll play and about keeping the culture of the game authentic.

Throughout the game, Trane will encounter these six legends, each of which will teach him a bit more about graf culture and different mediums through in-game cinematics. Seen shows him how to bomb entire subway cars, and Shepard Fairey, the man behind the OBEY giant posters and stickers, teaches him about wheatpasting, while Futura introduces him to the graf writer's blackbook and Smith teaches him the importance of stealth.

Can you tell us who some of the other 65 graf artists that are involved will be?

Oh, man. There are so many who lent their insight and art to

NEW RADIUS IS NOT VERY FRIENDLY TO TRANE AND OTHER GRAF ARTISTS. IT'S A CITY CAUGHT IN THE STRANGLE HOLD OF A CORRUPT MAYOR

the game. We've got guys like KAWS, Duro, Crash, FRAME, Iz the Wiz, JA, West, Reas, SKUF, KEL FIRST... And you can't forget the most famous female artist in the world, Lady Pink. One of the earliest additions, though, was Alan Ket, who really helped bring all these people together, not an easy feat by itself, but also was responsible for making sure the development of the game was real and accurate and not just some graf simulator.

How do Trane's skills progress? Will you start out doing tags, stencils and throw ups then progress to full pieces and productions?

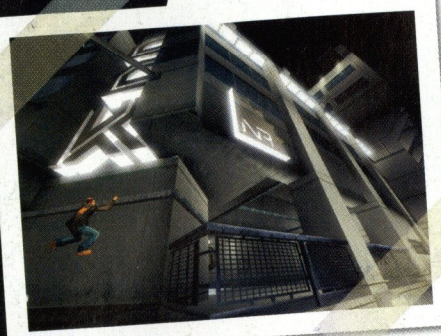
Yes, you're going from the simplest marker tags to stencils, rollups, wheatpasting, and eventually full color murals.

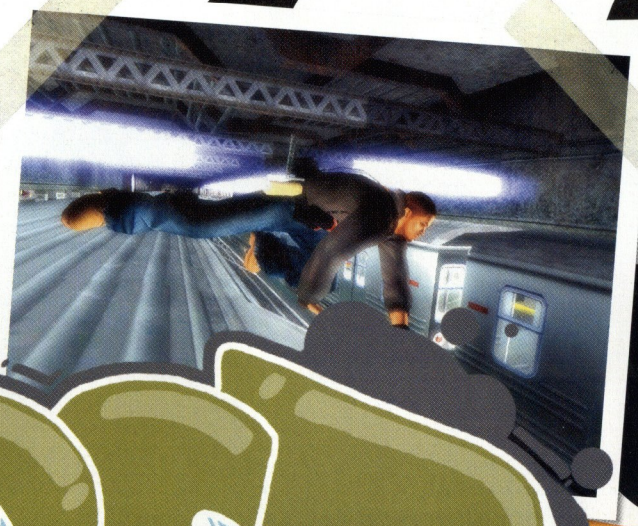
How is the actual act of "getting up" handled in the game?

This is a game built vertically. You begin underground and slowly progress upwards via scaffolding, rooftops, billboard, highway overpasses, pipes and any means possible to get to that "sweet spot" where your message will be seen by the most people possible.

Can you create your own art to use in the game?

We stayed away from customizable graf because we wanted to put the flag in the ground and give you the broadest street art experience possible. Haters aside, we let you go from shoe polish mops to wheatpasting to stenciling. In order to do it right, we wanted to ensure the look and execution of the pieces were tight. That said, several writers lent their talent for



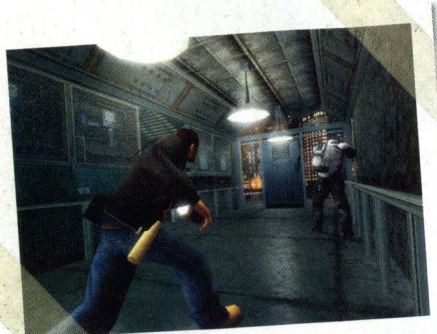


HYPER

Trane's art and there are over 1,000 art assets for you to use, giving the player a real sense of freedom and customization.

One of the key factors in the game is respect. How is that measured and what will increasing levels of respect open up for you?

Your measure of success or failure is measured by how strong your rep is. We've got different categories to measure you as you move from "Toy" to "All Borough," "All Borough King," "All City King, and "Legend." All of this is done by completing your various mission critical objectives noted as solid "Xs" when using Trane's intuition function.



Will Trane always be on his own or will he roll with a crew at some points in the game?

Eventually he does roll with the Still Free crew.

In the 80s battling against other graffiti writers was a huge part of the scene. Will that be a vital part of the game and how will it work?

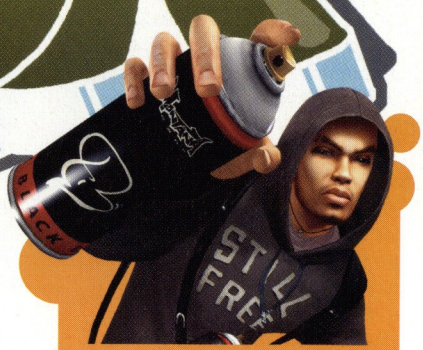
Definitely. Again, we wanted this game to be as reflective of graffiti life as possible and needed that tension caused by rival crews. In addition to dealing with the CCK, you will go head-to-head against the Vandals of New Radius.

What form will law enforcement take and how vigilant will they be about taking you (and your art) down?

The government of New Radius is Hell bent on suppressing your freedom of speech and have the firepower to bring you down. That's one of the primary reasons we developed the game's sneak tool. Graf artists are always looking over their shoulder, worried about getting caught. You need to assess the risk posed by each person you encounter and decide whether or not to engage in combat. A graf artist usually isn't armed so perhaps the best means of survival is to sidestep a CCK member or, worst case, look for creative ways to gain the upper hand like a makeshift blowtorch using an aerosol can and a lighter.

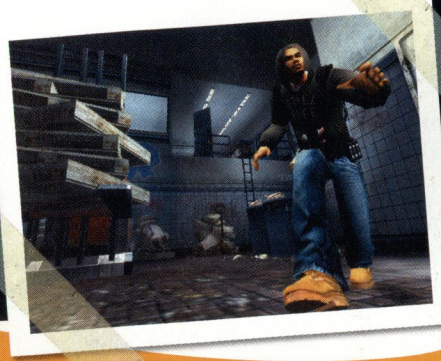
Describe how an average mission in Getting Up may play out.

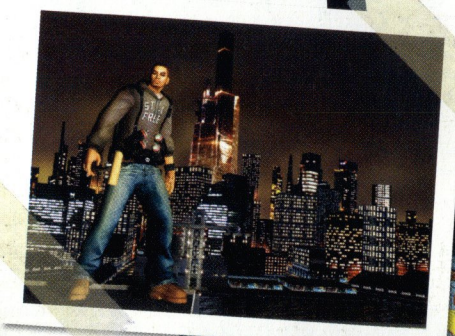
Each level is very distinct, but your main objective is to use your gameplay intuition to locate and complete mission critical objectives. As you navigate through the environment, you use one of your shoulder toggle buttons to see where you need to go, then figure out how to get there. Sometimes it's across a busy street, other times its on a billboard 40 feet above ground.

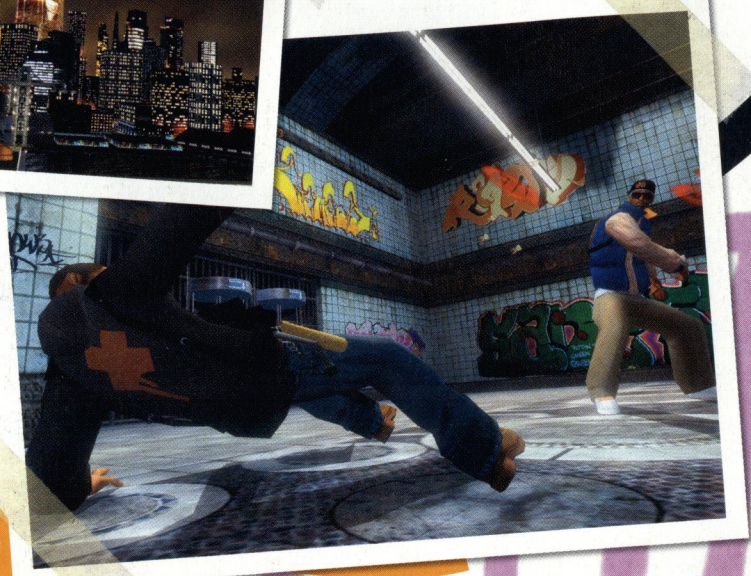


VOCAL SUPPORT

Getting Up is set to have one hell of a roster of actors, musicians and artists. In addition to hip hop artist Talib Kweli who will be voicing the main character Trane, Getting Up will also feature Rosario Dawson, Brittany Murphy, George Hamilton, Giovanni Ribisi, Andy Dick, MC Serch (who you may remember from 3rd Bass) and P Diddy. The people we're REALLY excited about though, are: Charlie Murphy (Eddie's brother, probably best known for his work on Chappelle's Show) as White Mike, one of Trane's crew; the RZA (from the Wu) as Stake, leader of the Wrong Day Assassins; and Adam West (the original Batman and Mayor Adam West from Family Guy) as Chief William Hunt. Hells yeah.







You also have non-mission critical objectives which you don't have to complete but will help increase your reputation.

What are some of the more unusual missions Trane may take on?

For sheer adrenaline, it's hard to beat tagging the side of a subway car while avoiding obstacles as it races down the tracks. Aesthetically, the underground layups were a milestone in the game development process. We actually took the team to see these spots where trains are worked on, allowing them to get a feel for the actual conditions a graf writer might encounter.

How free roaming will the gameworld be? Will you be able to pick and choose your missions or will the structure be entirely linear?

We developed an environment that would encourage the player to roam, not just horizontally but vertically. We also decided to break with convention and actually unlock most of the levels, allowing the player to select a level to play instead of waiting until the previous ones are complete. It's much more conducive to most people's schedules than a game that keeps you trapped for days at a time trying to figure out how to make some stupid jump. Select a chapter you enjoy, play for half an hour, then get on with your life.

Getting Up seems to be very focused on Trane's athleticism and ability to get to hard to reach places. How much of the gameplay would you say is "environmental puzzles" as opposed to combat?

It really depends on the individual. You could opt to avoid conflict and work on free-form graf or you could do nothing but beat down opponents. Why should I decide what your interests are? I'm simply providing the canvas, you fill it up as you see fit.

We've heard that Getting Up is the culmination of seven years of character and story development. It sounds like this is something you've been thinking about for a long time! How much has your vision for this game changed over that time? And what made you finally decide to approach game publishers to get it made?

Believe it or not, this started as a concept for an animated film. I may have been a little naïve back then, but I did know that I had the beginnings of something that could be very powerful when done correctly. At the same time, my clothing company, *ecko unltd., was going through some pretty tough financial times and I had to put the script aside while we sorted some things out. Then, about three years ago when our company was really rolling, my partner asked me to dust it off and see what I could do with it. At the same time, I was really getting into the various narrative-based games that followed Grand Theft Auto. It seemed like a perfect vehicle for this script, creating the industry's first true urban narrative.

What other games would you say influenced your thinking about Getting Up? Did you play much Jet Set/Grind Radio for instance?

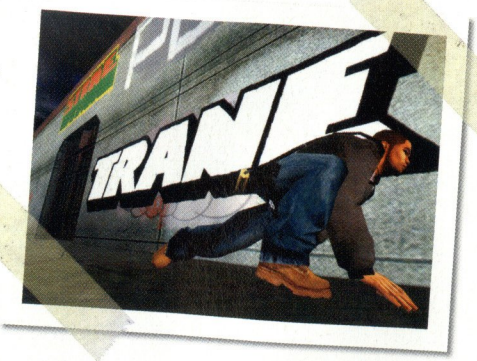
This is not Jet Grind or any other iteration of game pointing to graf. Historically graf has been used as a canned "pick-up," simply there to let you decorate the environment. With "Getting Up," it is as important to the game as the main character. Every inch of graf and the "extreme sport" of graf influenced this game, from the level design to the way Trane scraps with his fists.

How does the creative process flow between yourself and The Collective?

I visit studio almost every month and I shadow all key design and production functions with an executive staff that I employ. That said, it is very much a team effort and the sum is greater than the parts.

Although graffiti is a worldwide phenomenon, there are obviously certain countries and cities where it is more culturally important than others. Do you think Getting Up will still strike a chord with people who haven't been heavily exposed to graffiti culture?

I want people to acknowledge the authentic history of the most co-opted art of our time and to change their perception of reality. To see a tag on the side of a building not immediately dismiss it as filth. To wonder how the writer got it there and what the message behind a mural is. <<



FOR SHEER ADRENALINE, IT'S HARD TO BEAT TAGGING THE SIDE OF A SUBWAY CAR... AS IT RACES DOWN THE TRACKS

TEST DRIVE: UNLIMITED

Systems: **Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Racing** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Eden Games** ■ Due: **Early 2006**

Test Drive has had its fair share of very average sequels but with this eighth version, Eden Games is sure to return some glory to the Test Drive franchise. Embracing the original concept of the game, Test Drive: Unlimited aims to deliver the ultimate in pure road car driving experience and they're delivering something that really shows off what the Xbox 360 has to offer.

NOT JUST FOR LEPERS ANYMORE

The setting alone is mind-blowing. Rather than offering many different destinations in which to drive, Eden has instead gone for one single location — Hawaii. They're delivering more than 1000 miles of road and 6000 intersections to explore, just a little less than the actual amount of road in real-world Hawaii as they've removed dead ends and tweaked some road lines to deliver the best driving experience possible. The map is modelled off satellite data, delivering an amazing rendition of the island that will take a lot of exploring. As you drive the map, you 'unlock' all roads you have visited and can bookmark locations to jump back to that place at any time in future.

Out of the box you'll have access to more than 80 super detailed cars and bikes from more than 40 manufacturers, with another 50 available as downloads. The models are amazing, complete with accurate interiors that you can check out while driving. The cars (and bikes) offer fully functional headlights, wipers, horns and windows, with the noise of the wind whistling by as you drive at high speeds with the windows down. The radio works too, allowing you to play your own tracks, run an iPod playlist or even listen in to Internet radio.

On the play front, Eden has targeted a sandbox concept that offers plenty of single player fun while focusing in on a massive multiplayer world experience (two servers at launch — US & Europe — with instanced racing) that has plenty to offer both the casual and the committed player. There are 14 official racing modes as well as the ability for players to create their own race challenges. 50 rule parameters are available for setting up unique racing challenges. The game includes a comprehensive ranking system that is division-based, giving beginners a chance to strive for promotion to bigger divisions, rather than simply coming in with some insanely low rank that makes the system pointless. The system has an auto matchmaking service for finding racers with similar rankings.

THE SETTING ALONE IS MIND-BLOWING... EDEN GAMES ARE DELIVERING MORE THAN 1000 MILES OF ROAD AND 6000 INTERSECTIONS TO EXPLORE

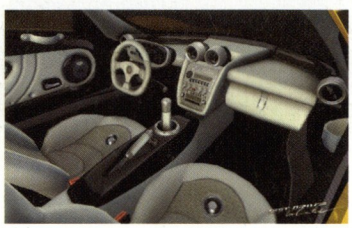
Just plain hanging out online is catered for as well, with car clubs forming a big part of the system. Clubs based on nations, car types or general interests can be formed, with club houses available where your in game avatars can interact outside the vehicle and where you can trade cars and parts. Trophies, rankings and logos can all be part of the club experience.

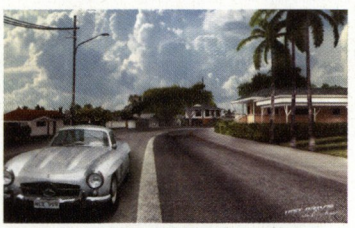
Players also start with their own houses, which they can expand and upgrade. Houses feature a living room for general game access, a dressing room for decking out your avatar, and the garage for housing your cars.

One of the best features that embraces the Test Drive concept is access to every car in the game from the outset. Visiting car dealerships allows you to buy the cars you want or to test drive those you can't yet afford. You can also rent vehicles to race in special events.

Policing, speed cameras, hitchhikers, thieves and psychos all add colour to the overall game world to spice things up.

Test Drive: Unlimited is looking to be fantastic. This is a fresh driving experience that offers a scale of production showing great promise for what the Xbox 360 has to offer. <<





WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
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V8 SUPERCARS 3

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Racing sim** ■ Players: **1-12 (PS2), 1-16 (Xbox), 1-21 (PC)** ■ Developer: **Codemasters** ■ Due: **Early 2006**

V8 Supercars 2 was a big hit in the Australian market and the next version definitely has plenty of promise for the fans of the series. Codemasters has paid attention to the desires of the community, improving on both the single and multiplayer action, and throwing in plenty of fresh ideas of their own.

FORMULA FORD HATERS

This time around, the main World Tour mode almost always has three choices at every stage and a minimum of two, so if you hate Formula Ford you're not going to have to race it. Ever. For those keen to play through every race, you can step sideways and backwards in this mode, so you never have to leave something behind.

There is also a Spoke mode, where you can play through a series in the race style of your choice. Six modes are available here — Classic, GT, Oval, Off-Road, Touring, and Open Wheel. The idea in these series is to move from entry level racing vehicles through to the pinnacle of the style. The pure V8 fans can also rejoice in a V8 series option appearing on the main screen.

Some of the best news for single player is the AI has been upped to make things more competitive. The biggest step here is that AI opponents will have more freedom in the lines they drive. This means they can take you on the inside or outside on bends, as well as duck in and out. Whether they flip the bird as they pass remains to be seen.

For the damage junkies, Codemasters has added a lot of model data so that your cars will break apart with full detail below the shell, and accidents have been upped to add some intensity to crashes — a healthy appreciation for our lust for hitting a wall now and then.

Sim elements like tyre wear and tyre temperature are now in the game and there are new damage categories. Corner cheats will now find they get grass in the under carriage and can expect hoses, gaskets and radiators to cop a hammering. For the die-hards, the pro mode goes even further to providing as perfect a sim as possible, but you can turn on pro mode options one at a time to smooth the transition. Other serious sim options include adding yellow flags, practice laps and qualifiers to events and you can even run qualifiers in online as both closed and open sessions.

CORNER CHEATS WILL NOW FIND THEY GET GRASS IN THE UNDER CARRIAGE AND CAN EXPECT HOSES, GASKETS AND RADIATORS TO COP A HAMMERING

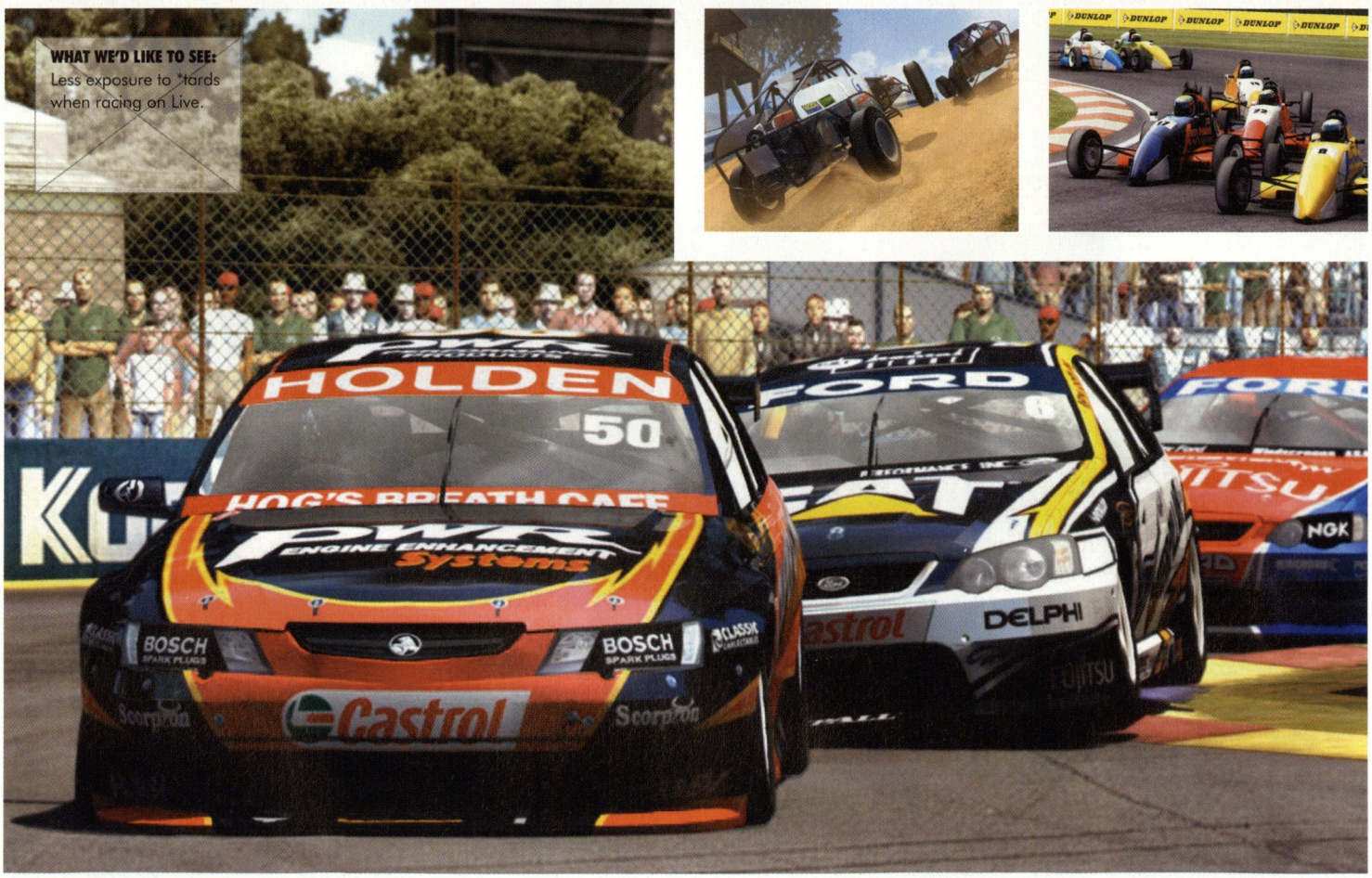
Weather conditions are now also part of the game. The cool thing here is that even a bright sunny day needs attention, with a hot track temperature needing a drive and wheels to suit. A track can even dry out between practice, qualifiers and the main event.

Tuners can go nuts in V8 Supercars mode, as you can tune your Holden or Ford for every track in the tour. What is great is you can easily save each test so you can tweak, drive, compare times and then reload the best settings. So much easier than trying to remember what the hell the tweaks were each time.

For the online crew, races will take up to 12 drivers on PS2 and up to 16 on Xbox Live, which will also use an ELO rating system for those keen to show off their talent through a four digit number.

The tour modes and championships offer plenty of promise for fans of this kind of wide and varied racing styles in the one game. With all the vehicle and track updates, this is shaping up to be a worthy addition to the series.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Less exposure to *tards when racing on Live.



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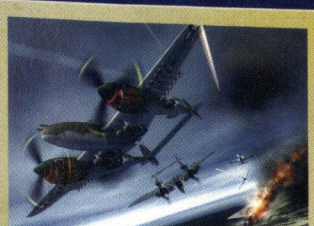

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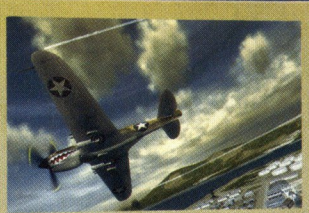

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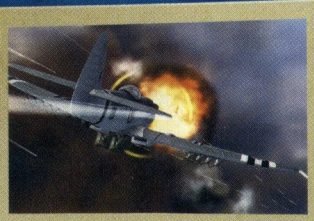
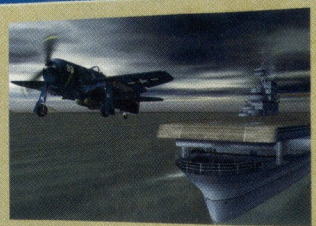


Incredibly detailed plane models



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ANIMAL CROSSING DS Q+A

Systems: **Nintendo DS** ■ Category: **Sim** ■ Players: **1-4** ■ Developer: **Nintendo** ■ Due: **Late 2005**

For those who played Nintendo's life simulator Animal Crossing on GameCube, the experience was unlike any Nintendo title before it. As players inhabited a small village they could literally spend hours collecting bugs, going fishing and rearranging their furniture, all in real-time with both the time and seasons changing according to those outside their window. Dubbed a 'communication game', Animal Crossing is now being ported over to Nintendo DS with some notable additions including full multiplayer and online support.

Apart from working as the director on Animal Crossing for GameCube, Katsuya Eguchi was also a lead designer for the courses seen in Super Mario Bros 3 for NES, director of the original Star Fox for SNES and Wave Race on N64. Hyper recently had the chance to sit down with the respected Nintendo developer and discuss Animal Crossing DS.

What was the genesis behind the original Animal Crossing?

The game first made its appearance at Nintendo during the development of the 64DD (add-on device for the Nintendo 64) which basically allowed a capacity for saving large amounts of data. We wanted to take advantage of this by creating a game world where a number of players could visit and whatever they did during their stay would be saved into memory, and from this Animal Crossing was born. Before Animal Crossing we were working on games like Mario and Zelda, in which the worlds were huge but the experience was essentially single player. We wanted to create a multiplayer game where players could interact and communicate with each other. So many of the characters and animals found within the game have very human like traits and personalities, paving the way for real life experiences.

How does this translate to the Nintendo DS and its features, including wireless capabilities and the touch screen?

The biggest improvement to the DS version is full utilisation of the wireless and wi-fi functionality, so not only can players interact with those players close to them but they can visit towns that could be very far away. So the wireless internet mode is used to let players interact with other players as they would if they were in the same room.

Animal Crossing is such a unique experience, how would you describe the game to someone who knew nothing about it?

If I were to introduce this game to someone who has never played Animal Crossing before, I might suggest that if there is someone you know that you would like to get to know better then this would be a good tool to make this happen – as communication is such a large part of the game. It's too hard to describe the content and number of activities found within the game so it would be better simply to have a go as you're bound to find something you like in Animal Crossing.

WITH UP TO FOUR PLAYERS BEING ABLE TO PLAY AT THE SAME TIME THIS WILL ALLOW THEM TO CREATE THEIR OWN RULES, GAMES AND GAMEPLAY

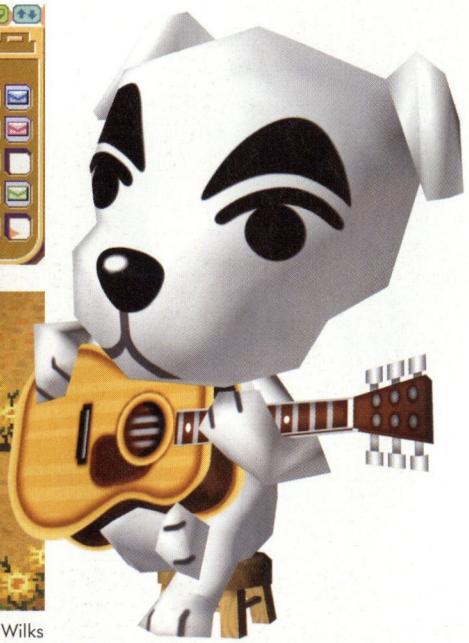
On the multiplayer side of Animal Crossing DS, what sort of gameplay can players expect apart from the ability to visit and communicate?

The multiplayer aspect allows up to four players, so a town can have up to three visitors. So with up to four players being able to play at the same time this will allow them to create their own rules, games and gameplay. So for example players could create their own fishing competition to see who can catch the most fish within a certain time limit. This is where it gets fun as players can create their own rules which all players must agree to.

For those that have played the GameCube version what differences can they expect with the DS version?

You can do everything you could do in the GCN version in the DS version but with a lot more interactivity, new characters and features like the ability to design more types of clothing, thanks to the dual screens and touch pad. In addition to simply design and writing the touch pad can be used to interact with the game world, such as the ability to shake trees. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
More dogs playing guitars of course.



[above] Super deformed... kinda like Wilks

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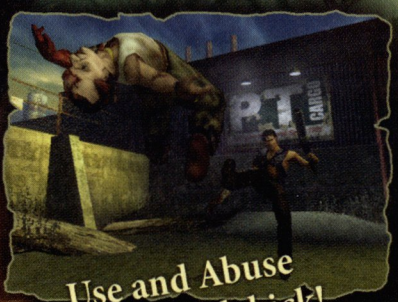

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NINTENDOGS

Systems: **Nintendo DS** ■ Category: **Virtual pet sim** ■ Players: **1-16** ■ Developer: **Nintendo** ■ Due: **Soon**

Tamagotchis may be dead and buried, but with the popularity of games like The Sims, it's not hard to see that there's plenty of room for more sophisticated renditions of the virtual pet concept. And after playing Nintendogs, it's obvious that Nintendo are the right company to resurrect it. Simply put, Nintendogs is going to be huge, and more importantly, it deserves to be huge. As much as games journalists the world over must be quivering at the possibility of writing delicious headlines like "Nintendo in the doghouse" or "Nintendo make a dog of a game", it's hard to see how anyone could fail to be charmed by this piece of software.

CHARLIE THE WONDERDOG

The concept is simple, and absolutely perfect for the Nintendo DS, as all interaction with your dog is via the touch screen and microphone, giving the game a tactile, real-time feel missing from other virtual pet sims.

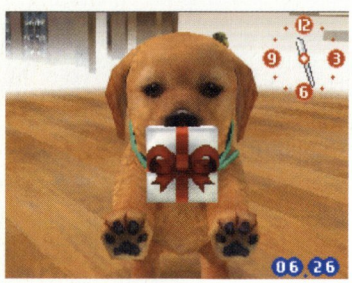
First of all you must visit the kennel and choose a puppy from one of a number of breeds. Nintendogs actually comes in three different versions – Chihuahua & Friends, Dachshund & Friends and Labrador & Friends, each of which has six different breeds available from the start (although all eighteen are apparently unlockable in each).

Your choice of dog is more than just aesthetic, as some will be far more willful than others, so it's probably best to choose an easy going and easily trained breed for your first pup. Once you get your dog home, you'll discover that there's a whole lot more to this game than simply giving your dog some attention and feeding it regularly. There's an array of commands for it to learn, starting with recognising its name and moving on to tricks like sit, lie down, roll over, shake hands and jump. These are triggered by a combination of voice and a stylus movement, and may take a while for your dog to learn but as in real life, practice and positive reinforcement go a long way. There are plenty of items that you can buy, find and unlock for playing with your dog, such as balloons and balls to chase, Frisbees to catch and even a skipping rope. Then there are bows and collars which you can use as rewards, and even a comical 10 gallon hat for your pup to wear. Ho ho.

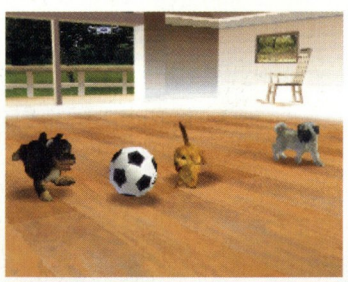
Exercise is important too, and there's a whole neighbourhood to explore on walks. The more you walk your dog, the greater its stamina becomes, allowing you to take it on longer walks and reach new areas. Along the way you'll meet and chat with other dog walkers, find a number of stores from which to buy toys and supplies, and have to clean up after your pet. Pretty soon you'll be able to enter your pooch in competitions, whether it's the Frisbee, Agility or Obedience comps, each of which have several levels to compete in. Plus, if you have friends with their own dogs, you can have wireless play dates to see how they get along. Hell, even if you don't have friends you might still find other dogs to interact with. If you've got your DS in sleep mode and go within a certain proximity of another DS owner with Nintendogs in sleep mode, your DS will actually start barking, alerting you to their presence! From there you could play or just exchange gifts or recorded messages!

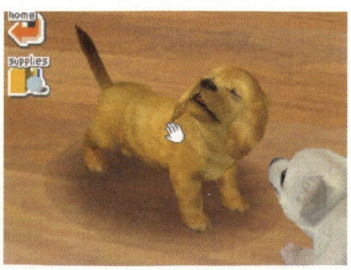
ALL INTERACTION WITH YOUR DOG IS VIA THE TOUCH SCREEN AND MICROPHONE, GIVING THE GAME A TACTILE, REAL-TIME FEEL MISSING FROM OTHER SIMS

Topping off the package, Nintendo have really nailed the presentation. The way your dog behaves is completely convincing, whether it's rolling onto its back for a belly scratch, sneezing when you touch its nose, looking bemused when you pick up one of its ears or playing with other dogs. We like. <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Our dog, Snoop, winning all the in-game dog shows.





He's looking a little sheepish...

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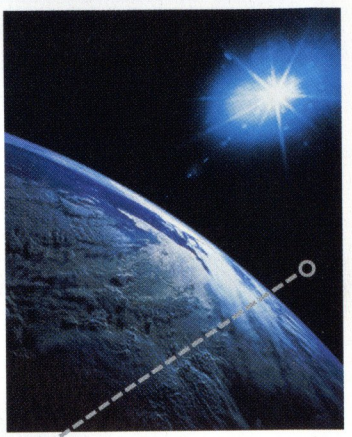

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F.E.A.R HANDS-ON

Systems: **PC** ■ Category: **FPS/horror** ■ Players: **1-16** ■ Developer: **Monolith** ■ Publisher: **Vivendi** ■ Due: **September 05**

I've just died for the fifth time in as many minutes and Darren "Hottie Funbags" Wells sniggers from behind me, obviously thinking that due to my console leanings my PC skills are far from l337. I hit the reload button again and prepare myself for another clone soldier onslaught. Now that I finally have a chance to get my hands on a nearly finished copy of F.E.A.R. I'm not going to let something as simple as death get in the way of me getting as much out of the code as I can.

HIGH PING GAMING

The level loads again and I creep into the maze of containers, waiting for the first telltale shout of a clone soldier warning his teammates that a hostile has entered the area. The shout comes and the first bullets start pinging off surfaces around me. I throw a grenade in the general direction of the fire, hear a yell and see the clones scatter. The explosion is a little anticlimactic in the fact that all I've managed to kill is a rat and a cardboard box. I switch from my pistol to my SMG (something I forgot to do last time, probably accounting for the quick loss or life) and fire a couple of rounds into the nearest clone. He doesn't go down but he does back off. My health starts to decrease at an altogether alarming rate and I realise that one of the other clones had taken the time to crawl under one of the containers and flank me. I pop a health pack, RLF and try to find some cover. I see two of the soldiers coming. I panic, slow time, throw a grenade and wait. As the grenade flies between the two soldiers coming my way I fire, aiming as well as I can. The rapid fire is a little erratic but one of the bullets finds its mark. The explosion is glorious, as are the two bodies ragdolling through the air. The other two clones don't stand a chance now. They fall... eventually and I hammer the F5 a couple of times to make sure that the game is well and truly quicksaved. Then I remember to breathe – something I then promptly forget to do a few minutes later when a freaky little girl peels the flesh off a soldier.

THE CLONES WILL KNOCK OVER SHELVES TO CREATE MAKESHIFT COVER, CRAWL UNDER DESKS, LEAP RAILINGS... AND MAKE YOUR LIFE A LIVING HELL

It's hard to talk about F.E.A.R. (First Encounter Assault and Recon) without giving away some serious plot spoilers and if my experience is anything to go by, experiencing the plot unfolding and beginning to understand just what the hell is going on is nearly as much of a pleasure as the set piece gunfights against some incredibly clever foes. What I can tell you without giving too much away is that F.E.A.R. probes the age-old survival horror scenario of science run amok and man delving into knowledge he was not meant to know. Naturally it all ends up with a bunch of blood, running and screaming. In terms of actual content in the game, there isn't really anything that you haven't seen in other games before but the way they are presented and intertwined are totally fresh and, quite frankly, amazing. On a basic level, the player's character can, for no readily explainable reason (aside from being told in the briefing that his reflexes are off the scale), enter what is essentially bullet time.

Rather than just a cool looking

Sony's new Aibo - not quite as friendly

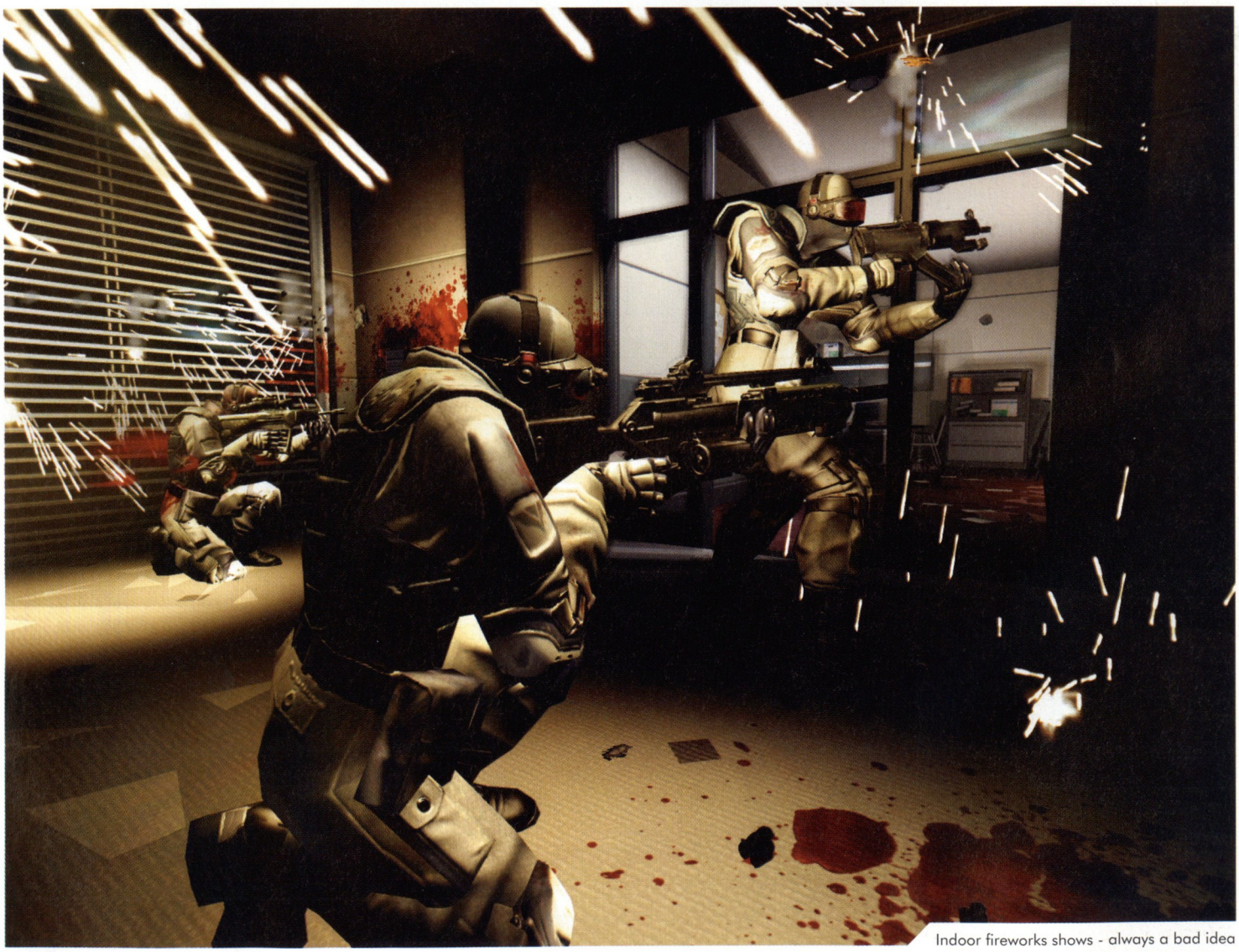
gimmick though, slow time in F.E.A.R. is an absolute necessity to survive. Careful use of this skill is vital when fighting against the clone soldiers we've encountered so far. They are clever. Alarmingly so. Not only do the soldiers actually act as a cohesive unit, calling orders to each other, providing covering fire, using grenades to flush you from hiding and all other manner of clever tactics, the clone soldiers also use the environment to its fullest extent. Given opportunity the clones will knock over shelves to create makeshift cover, crawl under desks or other low objects, leap railings, set up fields of fire and generally make your life a living hell. Alarmingly, one of the enemies encountered towards the end of our time with the game not only displayed the ability to interact with the environment but also the ability to slow time like the player. We have a funny feeling that encounters like this will become far more frequent an occurrence later in the game.

BUMP IN THE NIGHT

And then there's Alma. We don't know who she is as yet and we don't have any idea what she is but we do know one thing for sure – she's as creepy as hell. When we first heard about the game and were informed that it was going to be a cross between the action of the Matrix and the scares of The Ring we were, to say the least, a little dubious. Now seeing the scary little girl in action, hearing her laugh and jumping every time something creepy happens we have become believers. Time to pull out the brown trousers. <<

Don't be dead dude

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
More creepy little girls in games.



Indoor fireworks shows - always a bad idea

Addictive as Crack?

THE TALE OF AN EVERQUEST VIRGIN By Christian Read

I have never liked multiplayer gaming. I mean, I game to block out the undeniable horror of everyday life, like writing for this magazine. I turn out the lights, smoke a million cigarettes, drink beer and coffee in an attempt to separate the hemispheres of my brain, and then load up the game of choice. I can lose myself in fantasies of being a cold-blooded murderer, a busty murderer, a murderer with a car, or even some kind of army man. Who does some murdering. My gaming den is warm and safe and I can hide from the frothing monsters that represent average members of the community. I don't like people very much.

So, why should I mix with humans during my leisure time? I didn't know and neither did the cruel masters that are my editors. They summoned me into their lair and handed me a copy of EverQuest 2 and laughed hollowly. The pair of them are well aware of my aversion to any form of socialising and put me on this assignment out of hate.

"WHAT IS ONLINE GAMING LIKE FOR THE NOOB?"

Let me give you full disclosure. A long time ago I played Asheron's Call, reviewing it for PC Powerplay. Not a bad game, but the experience of playing it was quite horrendous. People often express envy that game reviewers get to play games quite some time in advance of the public and I won't lie; it's pretty friggin cool. Except when you are on a game that requires the participation of other players. I ran around the server looking for people to talk to and got pretty much nothing. One bloke ran around some trees waving a sword at me. I think he was asking me out. I found what looked like that monk who set himself on fire to protest the Vietnam War (before the fire, obviously). I asked that dude if there was anything to do. He said "No", and then attacked me. It wasn't a player vs. player server, though. I sat there for a moment watching him flail away at me. Knowing he very well could have been a fellow game reviewer with similar early privileges, I decided not to press the point. I liked to think of it as a professional courtesy but really, I was embarrassed for us both.

Gave me an idea though, so I swapped to the PVP server. Hopefully some action to be found there. I'm sure you're not surprised to find out that I watched what seemed to be a transvestite convention of blokes in dresses slapping each other. It was, literally, a collection of first to fifth level characters slapping at each other while hurling semi-literate abuse about.

That was the full extent of my online gaming. Aside from a quick game of Counter-Strike, which saw me mercilessly sniped, you may understand why I have little interest in multiplayer gaming.

I especially didn't want to go into a fantasy game world and have to talk to people. I have no idea where you stand on the matter, but I really don't do very well with talking about these sorts of things in public. Again, in the privacy of my room, being Magicthighs Orcfondle the seventeenth level Felch Lord might be a bit of fun, but having to talk about it makes it seem like exactly what it is, kind of silly. There's a test I apply to situations like these and it's a simple one. If I wouldn't mention it on a crowded bus, it deserves to be enjoyed only in the privacy of my own study. If you are capable of happily discussing your magic elf Molestro in front of a woman, good luck to you. I am not, and therefore see little reason to indulge in the habit with real people. Even people on the Internet. With fear in my heart, I began a journal of a day's online gaming. Here is an hour by hour account of my experience in EverQuest 2

Monday 22nd March

13:30 Fearful of terrible fantasy clichés, I flip open the EverQuest 2 booklet, I really was a bit leery of the whole thing. Dark Elves and Tiger people, lizardmen, catmen, and even the wildly imaginative rat people. Personally, I was hoping to be able to pick something with the head of a man and the body of a chicken. Or the head of a lion and the body of a lion. But a different lion. Not only is there a whole bunch of, frankly, lame character races, the classes seem to be, worse than that, dull. Bards, wizards, clerics and brick shithouse fighters. Oh, sure there's a level tree that allows you to be badass but, honestly, this is all so familiar. Bards and clerics, man. All so done.

Still, there's something to be said about familiarity when, like me you are all set to enter into a frightening new realm, that of socialising. All in all, though, EverQuest 2 wasn't shaping up to be what anyone could call promising.

It's a... *rolls dice* pleasure to meet you

Ye verily forsoothe sweet maiden (a/s/l)?

Thou canst sucketh my balls nublet

Dude! Your toon has a sweet ass!

14:45 About this time I phoned up my mate Simon. Simon plays a Troll, and is quite the fan of EQ from years back. I made him arrange to meet me in game so I would have someone to talk to. Simon gushed enthusiastically. He's a hard-core Star Wars Galaxies fan now, and he told me a quick story.

"I was on a solo mission on Tattooine when I was about to get taken out by Tusken Raiders. They'd surrounded me and I was running real low on health. I had turned tail to run like buggery when, just as I was about to get taken out, the Raiders are taken out by a burst of blaster fire. A female bounty hunter had been watching me, and decided to save me at the last minute. Straight out of a movie, man. You just can't get that with single player games."

I was doubtful, more concerning the fact he'd met a girl than the scenario, but still... that did seem kind of cool.

15:00 So, I load up and decide what I'm going to be. Rat man is just so ridiculous as to be tempting but in the end I went with Dark Elf. All the hot girls are going to be Dark Elves I reckoned. Sad mistake. Now, in EQ2, you have to pick which of two cities you are going to live in. Good or evil. As a Dark Elf, I automatically get stuck in Freeport, that wretched hive of scum and villainy.

Thankfully, all my decisions are being made for me, except for a name. At this point in time I should say that a few of these names are being slightly altered for anonymity. After all, I wouldn't want some elf prince mad at me.

15:30 I decide to forgo my standby name Ballzonchyn and pick my old Diablo 2 character, "Anguish McBastard". All good. Then I'm taken to some island while what looks like a dangerous pederast asks me what kind of character I'm going to be, except it is phrased like a job interview. This is gaming? This is like being back in high school, while your careers teacher blathers on about job security. Well, I'll tell the game what I wish I'd told my teachers. Necromancer. That looks good. Except it is going to take a few quests to open that class up. Ah well. It'll give me something to do.

16:20 From there, I'm given a quest to actually get into the city. It involves running around trying to kill things. While doing this, I meet my first genuine player. His name is Thundarr and he is a Dark Elf too. And here is where I run across my first serious trouble with an online game. As a new character, there was something I'd simply never considered...

Characterisation. I mean, do I approach as the fearsome Anguish, the

"I cast magic missile... at the darkness!"

One of the arguments made to me as to why we should all be online gaming is that it reintroduces a real human element to computer gaming, especially the role-playing aspect. Just like playing Dungeons and Dragons and other RPGs with mates.

Have you ever pen and paper role-played? It's excruciating. You sit in a room with an overweight fellow with a picture of an anime girl in his wallet, an overweight woman in a crushed velvet dress, a hypochondriac who whines about your smoking directly into her trachea, then you pretend to fight monsters in a dungeon for five hours, until someone quotes The Simpsons. It's like online role-playing but without a computer. But online gaming will always be worse, if that's possible, than pen and paper gaming for a simple reason; you can always look into the eyes of a pen and paper gamer and say, "Please don't kill my character. I've been playing for twenty minutes and barely know the rules." Online PKs remain icily distant. And in online gaming you never know if it's some bitter divorcee ninjaing you, some vicious Korean kid on some specially trained team who has to kill you or his sister disappears, or the possibility that it is actually a genuine girl. Trust me, knowing that a man with a stained Next Gen T-Shirt is spoiling your evening is better than the mystery. At least in pen and paper gaming you can always look into your persecutor's cow eyes and say "virgin". Yes.

Addictive as Crack?

fell and black-handed aspiration to the necromantic arts? Type something like "Ho there, fellow traveller on the paths of evil. I see thou too dost seek entrance to the grim metropolis of Freeport? Might I suggest a brief union of our talents?" Or do I approach as Christian, who is sitting in a well-lit office, drinking a cup of Earl Grey. "Hey man. I'm new to this. How's things?" No one explains these things in the manual, after all. I know because I looked.

I simply say "Greetings and salutations." Sounds wank-fantasy speak enough, but if he thinks I'm a total tosser, I can always assuage my own ego by claiming I was quoting Christian Slater in Heathers. Thankfully, Thundarr is a normal human creature and responds with a simple Hi. Tension I didn't know I had drains from my shoulders. I don't have to sacrifice twenty minutes of my life sounding like a dickhead typing, "Aye, boon companion."

Thundarr and I talk briefly and I tell him I'm writing about the game. He tells me that he's never really played EQ2 but he's a fan of DAOC. It takes me a moment to realise he's talking about Dark Ages of Camelot and not his sexual preferences. We chat for a moment about MMORPGs and he tells me to look him up when we're in the city. That wasn't so hard. Just like chatting online with any normal stranger. My first conversation as a newbie and I wasn't a trail.

18:00 Eventually, I completed the city quest and tracked down Simon. Apparently part of the fun of EQ2 involves tracking down and renting your own property. This involves all the fun of real estate hunting and spending money in an online game. Seriously. They expect me to believe house hunting is a viable use of my luxury time? We found a house in a suitable gothic and spooky part of town. Simon explained to me that a lot of people set up business out of their houses. Great. Now I get to experience all the joy of installing a small company? Nein.

Part of the EQ2 economy, you see, is the Artisan system. All classes have some Tradeskill, the ability to make and maintain useful items like potions and weapons. To other people, that may sound like a sure-fire way to meet people. Set up a nice healing potions shop and people are certain to pop round at all hours. You ask me, it's an invitation to have people coming to score at your house 24/7. Yet again, no.

19:30 I stop, and have some dinner. I note that some seven hours have gone past with mild surprise. That's a good sign. I've always thought one of the secret measurements for a great gaming experience is insomnia.

20:00 Finally, it was time to go Questing. Simon assembled a crack group of adventurers, two he knew personally, and two he had met while I was sorting out the new digs. These fine fellows included:

- **Loric**, a dark elven scout
- **Icequeen**, an inquisitor
- **Twizt**, a barbarian
- **SmooveD**, an illusionist
- **Marlylight**, Simon's troll Bruiser
- And **me**, a dark elf wizard.

This was what I'd been waiting for! A bunch of badass mofos, assembled together with a hell born need to kill, preparing to hunt down ancient quaint and curious volumes of forgotten lore! Yes!

FOR THE FINAL TIME, NO. Let me state for the record that EverQuest 2 is a beautiful game. It looks and sounds incredible, with spectacular spell animations and all that jazz. I cannot fault the game in any serious way.

But, by god, they need some sort of a bouncer. SmooveD turned out to be a rather heavy weight fan of Enterprise. He had just learned of the show's imminent demise and decided to pontificate, to me, at length on the show. I friggin' hate Star Trek and so figured I could get out of it by just saying I'd never watched the show. Bad mistake. He decided to fill me in on details of the show. For the love of God, I couldn't figure out how someone could type such drivel and still play the game but SmooveD filled it in. Ice Princess seemed promising. I quietly spoke to her for a moment, trying to return to some in game chatter. Asking about her character, all that stuff. Then the Princess began to flirt. But flirt in such a way that the Princess was obviously a horny fourteen year old, gender indeterminate.

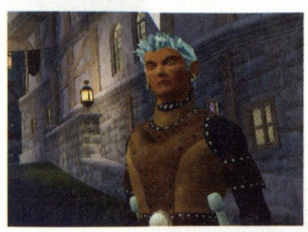
And then there was Twizt. Twizt spoke 'leet.' For those lucky few of you who don't know what I'm talking about, leet, or more properly, 733t 5p34k, was a kind of pigeon that sprung up on deathmatch servers, around the same time Quake really picked up popularity. It quickly transformed into its own diabolic dialogue. Let me give you a quick example of a typical conversation Twizt and I had. Bear in mind this following conversation is edited to make me look good.

Me: *OK, chaps. I've got a lightning burst spell. That's my only really good offensive spell, but it seems jolly effective against these low level blackguards. I'll attack the orcs from a distance, when they see us, you meet them with a sterling ambush.*

NERF SHAMANS!!!

ROFLCOPTER!!! SOMEONE CALL A WAHMBULANCE!

LFG emo mage any high end instance PST or I will cry



Twizt: *h3h3 joo'r3 +h3 $+3rIiNg bu$h. 10101*

Me: *Excuse me, sir, I'm afraid I don't understand that strange tongue you speak.*

Twizt: *+h3N $+oP $uxoriNg @Nd b3iNg @ noob*

Me: *I've never hated anything on God's green earth like I hate you.*

And on it went. I must admit to some enjoyment when Loric, quite a silent figure until then, upbraided Twizt. "Dude, you're spoiling it. Plz talk proper." I ignored the rich irony and grammar, and privately thanked Loric. He said little else back. I don't know if he was trying to be in character as a laconic archer or, like me, he just found it hard to talk and play the game at the same time.

As a new player, I found this genuinely confusing. I knew in theory what the language was but I didn't know people actually communicated with it. I always thought it was just a special way of making fun of gamers on the goddamned internet! Jeff K style! What was worse than not understand the leetness was that my ignorance seemed to single me out as hopelessly square. A fact that's sadly true but it's not nice to point that out.

Soon, though, the endless prattling became too much. It was the fact that I couldn't shut the little bastard up that revealed to me my final problem with multiplayer gaming. The fact it's considered rude to simply execute anyone who gives you the shits. EQ2 has no Player v Player mode. It didn't matter that I was out there in the Commonlands, up to my neck in minions of the Prince of Hate, I really wanted this little ignorant bastard to be dead right now. Sadly, I had to get him killed off.

Online celebs

Heather Graham plays EverQuest. So does Vin Diesel, American Baseball great Mark McGuire. Porn star Asia Carrera is a renowned former addict of Unreal Tournament. Black comedian X is a Halo 2 junkie. I suppose all this means that you should be careful about how you treat people online. You never know if you could be sucking up to some hatefully pretty celebrity, or someone you actually respect and admire. So please, watch how you treat strangers.

But then again, the chances of you actually meeting Heather Graham online are sort of remote, so I imagine you can go back to speaking in your gibberish "leet".

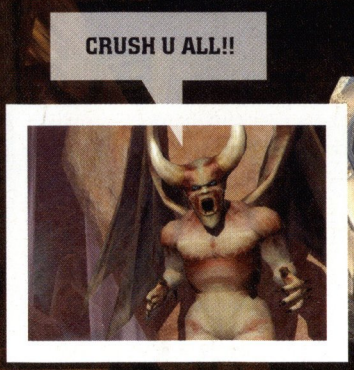
It was then I discovered the Experience Debt. In EQ2, once you've officially joined a group, if any of you die, the entire group is tarnished with the loser brush and everyone takes a penalty in XP. What this encourages is working closely together with a group of gifted players who will work as a team. What it actually produced was two hours with a Trek nerd, a freak with gender problems and some mindless bit of shit with two eyes who jabbered an increasing amount of insolent babble. I genuinely felt as if my options within the game were limited by the Debt system. Instead of taking risks, instead of being able to cut loose, I felt, well, indebted to the people around me to behave very conservatively.

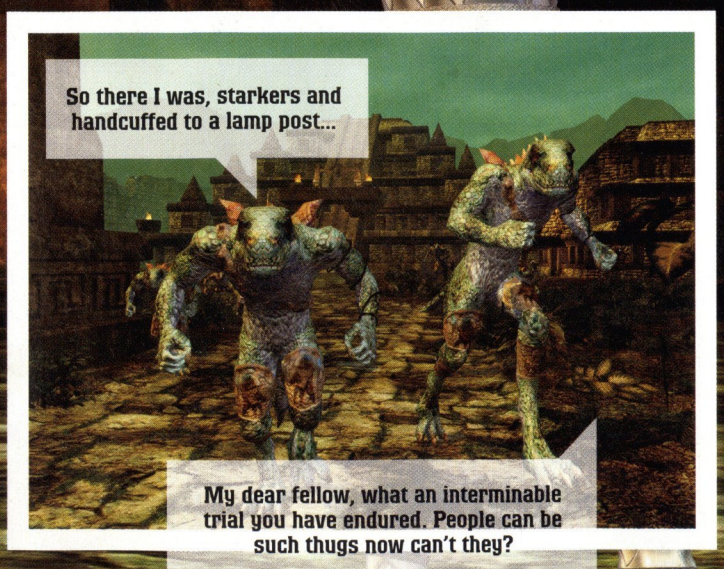
We completed the quest for the Lorebooks and that was it. I'd had enough. I put Twizt on my ignore list, blessed, blessed ignore list and went home. Simon and I chatted for a while then I logged off.

And that was it. My first time seriously going online. There should be a moral to this story, some tricks I learned to pass on to new gamers ready to make the leap to online games. Perhaps I've got to be more open to new things. Perhaps I've got to embrace the social side of gaming. Perhaps half the people who log on to MMORPGs are as deeply, spectacularly brain-damaged as I expect them to be. Regardless, all I know is that gaming with people is hard work and conflicting playing styles quickly undermine the experience. I wish I was able to finish this article with a scathing damnation of the online game, telling you all it is a hideous waste of time. It wasn't though. All I've really learned is that online gaming is like a rather bad party. Go in with an open mind, avoid the obvious freaks and don't be a knob and you should be fine. Go in like me, grumpy and dismayed, and you'll probably find making friends is not as easy as it looks. In fact, it's hard work and with the Experience Debt concept, you can keep your mates down, or be kept down by them. No one wants to play with a spaz, after all.

Here's an ironic coda for those of you folk who find my attitude unfathomable. I've learned why the damn thing is nicknamed EverCrack and don't seem to be able to stop. I now play with a small group of folk I know in the real world and I like that just fine.

Swing on by and find me. I've got a plan to become an overlord of Freeport and need support. Talk to me like a renaissance faire freak bastard, talk about football, talk to me about your mum, but just don't TALK LIKE THIS. Or I will find a way to make you dead. ⁂





XBOX LIVE! ROUNDUP

MARCH STEPNIK PLAYS XBOX LIVE MORE THAN IS PERHAPS HEALTHY, SO WE PUT HIM TO WORK...

Debuting at the end of 2002, Xbox Live – Microsoft's subscription based online multiplayer service – has gone from strength to strength. From humble beginnings and two substantial upgrades, Live has morphed into a classy multiplayer arena. Microsoft also recently passed a major milestone: two million members from around the world. That's a helluva lot of Tourette's Syndrome-suffering kids to play against. Ahh, the joys of voice communication...

What makes Live so attractive (after you learn to avoid the dregs of the online community – build a good friends list, and just leave bothersome sessions) is that in an increasing number of titles the online multiplayer experience is not only an extension of the main single player game (Pro Evolution Soccer 4, Need For Speed Underground, Crimson Skies for example), but of a higher quality itself (the likes of Star Wars Battlefront, Conker Live & Reloaded, Rainbow Six 3, Ghost Recon 2, Forza Motorsport). Developers have risen to the challenge of providing substantial online support in the hopes of developing community following and the real winners are us. With a total of around 250 Live enabled games expected by the end of 2005 there's just so much choice out there right now.

Here's a look at what's being played on Xbox Live today. Games have been graded out of three stars (★★★).

ACTION GAMES

HALO 2, MULTIPLAYER MAP PACK ★★★

www.bungie.net

■ Halo 2 is the king of the Live hill and it's all thanks to Bungie's absolutely brilliant support of the online community. Forgetting the killer play modes, tight network code (making for mostly lag-free sessions) and the occasional free map, Bungie has just poured on the love with all manner of goodies and service integration at the Bungie.net web site. Clan support, RSS feeds, stat-tracking and Live alerts on your PC are standard, with more updates coming.

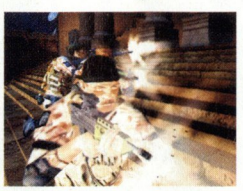
The biggest news in the Halo 2 world of late is the Multiplayer Map Pack (which is incidentally also completely friendly with non-Live arrangements such as LAN and single-system multiplay) which was released in retail not long ago at $29.95. The pack gives players 9 new maps and a bunch of minor tweaks. The only snag here is that four of the nine maps are already available for free download from Live and the rest will be available for nix in the near future, so you might want to think about it.

The one major downside to Halo 2's popularity on Live is the proliferation of cheaters out there. If you take your games seriously report the buggers: Microsoft and Bungie take cheaters very seriously and reward them with a timely ban from Live.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT ★★★

www.lucasarts.com/games/swbattlefront/

■ Unlike most of the other shooters out there, Battlefront doesn't offer much in the way of customisation and it's all the better for it. With a solid (though dated) game engine and straightforward team and class-based play (up to 32 players), Battlefront is the sort of game you just pick up and play. With the aim of controlling each of the large Star Wars-themed maps through either owning all the control points or ploughing through your opponent's reinforcements, Live multiplayer makes up for the lacklustre single player game. Oh, and the ability to play as Star Wars characters, pilot cool SW vehicles and run about in famous SW locations seems to have cemented Battlefront's regular position high on the Live charts.



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW ★★★

www.ubi.com/AU/Community/

■ The Black Arrow expansion pack adds Conquest, Capture the Flag and Live v3.0 support to the already solid Live game modes of Rainbow Six 3. The ability to plan games in a private lobby is one of the more welcome additions here, as are user-set competitions, online file storage (for clan liveries and the like), and more comprehensive stat tracking in clan play.

The big drawcard for Rainbow Six 3 is the ability for up to four players to co-operatively play the single player campaign (as well as custom missions), adding the challenge of co-ordinating the surgically tactical gameplay required for success. Covert-op missions have never been so much fun.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON 2 ★★★

www.ubi.com/AU/Community/

■ Ghost Recon 2 consistently sits high atop the Live most played charts, and having around 20 game modes is sure to have something to do with it. With an emphasis on team play, multiple play modes and a collection of well-designed maps, Ghost Recon 2 on Live plays a lot like a day at the paintball. The action's more thoughtful and realistic than most shooters out there, serving as a good alternative to the proliferation of fast-paced twitch shooters. With the ability to form clans, official competitions and comprehensive stat tracking thanks to Live v3.0, Ghost Recon 2 gets nothing but big-ups.

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY ★★★

www.ubi.com/AU/Community/

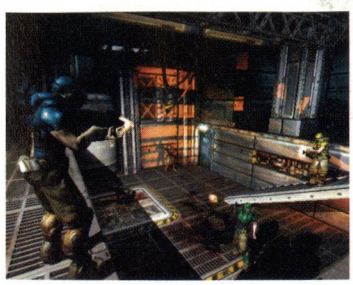
■ Building on the success of the highly innovative "spies vs. defenders" mode in Pandora Tomorrow, Chaos Theory's take on multiplayer is refreshingly unique if not a little hardcore. The premise is simple: spies sneak into a map to complete an objective using every stealth trick in the book while a number of lumbering guards must protect against them. Chaos Theory adds a new story mode and multiple objectives into the fray, as well as a bunch of new maps (which require some serious study for any chance of success). Being able to play a handful of the levels in co-op mode is also good fun, but a little short lived.

DOOM 3 ★

www.idsoftware.com

■ The real dunce of this category has to be Vicarious Vision's conversion of id's Doom 3. This is old-school multiplayer held back by an engine just a bit too ahead of its time. Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Tourney and Last Man Standing game modes are the only play modes offered, with a maximum of four players per game. With only a small handful of maps and a terrible visual stutter when there's any hint of lag, it's no surprise that this one isn't getting a huge online following.

Co-operative play – which is only available over Live – is Doom 3's saving grace. The lag issue disappears here although the need to hike back from the start of the level to point of death is a major pain in the arse. For some real fun, turn on friendly fire.



THE REST

■ With little of the humour and much of the swearing of the main game, **CONKER LIVE & RELOADED** ★ on Live is a reasonably fun team-based shooter – providing you have the numbers. Most of the maps are suited to larger player numbers and the slow weapon management system (which gives a good advantage to any bots found in a level) begs for real opponents to level up the playing field.

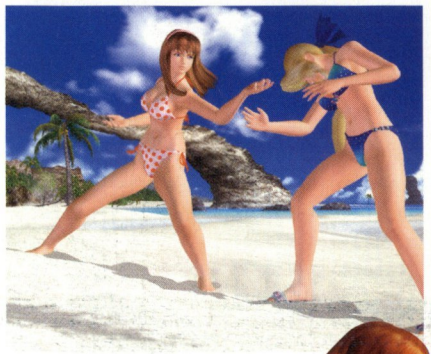
A comic book shooter with ADD, **UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2** ★★★ offers some interesting twists to its FPS heritage and is an absolute blast to play. A new third person perspective highlights the series' hyperactive direction; forget double jumps, you can wall bounce up structures with acrobatic ease. Melee attacks are now a legitimate currency in the solid collection of play modes and levels (50 in all), but it's the ability to customise games that gives this one its longevity.

COUNTER-STRIKE ★★ and **CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE** ★★★ also have big followings on live for their pick up and play, instant-action antics.

FIGHTING GAMES

DOA ULTIMATE ★★★

www.neotaku.com/doalive/



■ Featuring the first ever Western release of the original Dead or Alive (which is just cool) and a visually updated (and absolutely gorgeous) Dead or Alive 2, DoA Ultimate is a perfect example of a fighting game done right on Live. There are a number of play modes to get busy with, including the staple one on one, team battle, tournament, survival and kumite (a fight fest), with stats tracked for each separate game mode. The real innovation, though, comes in the "winner stays" mode. Up to eight players battle it out in turns; six players take the role of spectator while two engage in fisticuffs at a time. The winner, of course, stays on to play the next challenger. Much kudos goes to Tecmo for bringing the Arcade "huddle-around-the-cabinet" vibe to Live. This one's highly recommended, but come prepared: the competition is stiff.

STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION ★★★

www.shoryuken.com/

■ The included near-perfect conversion of Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike is the real reason to get this title, and the Live play just serves as the icing on the cake. Whether it's Street Fighter II or III, the online multiplayer options are decidedly no-frills; you've got only the usual optimatch, quickmatch and create a match settings to play around with. The tight network code is what makes this one so addictive – within moments you're up against a real live player who might as well be sitting next to you.

MORTAL KOMBAT DECEPTION ★★

mortalkombatonline.com/

■ AKA "the fighting series that will just not die", Deception adds a chess mode and a Tetris-style puzzle game to the traditional one on one fighting for a bit of fun and variety online. Just beware that Deception mostly appeals to younger players – the real fighting action happens with DoAU and Street Fighter.

SPORTS GAMES

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 ★★★

www.pesfan.com

After a bit of a poor start, Konami volleyed back with a substantial patch fixing the game's most central flaws. The ability to skip cut scenes has sped things up (although you still have to watch the offside vid) and a new punishment system aimed at early quitters (granting an instant 0-3 loss to the offending player) have been welcomed by the faithful.

The basic play options and the frustrating ranking system (which favours numbers of games played rather than win ratio) mar this otherwise excellent title, which are issues we hope will be addressed in Pro Evolution Soccer 5. Otherwise, this is a solid, classy piece of football code – online or off.

Solo?

If multiplayer doesn't interest you in the slightest then there's not much of an incentive to go Live. Worthwhile downloadable content (like the Hurricane pack for Ninja Gaiden) is a feature used only by developers with the resources to do so (read: a precious few), so is really only an incidental bonus to existing Live users. And you have to pay for it anyway.

Also bear in mind that games that have the label "Live Enabled" don't necessarily have an online play component. Being Live Enabled simply means that you'll be logged into Live while playing so that friends can still contact you – even if you're in a single player only game. It's a really good idea, but plenty of people have been stung thinking these games are playable online.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2005 ★★

www.eaplay.com/australia/

With the ability to choose a ranked or an unranked game, FIFA 2005 caters well to those wanting to avoid the stats and indulge in some practice or some genuine competition (non-ranked games being one way to better avoid cheaters). Another treat is the ability to play fully-supported tournaments online with up to seven other players – with EA's frequent official promotions offering some cool prizes being another incentive. As it stands though, FIFA 2005 is consistently beaten out by PES4 on Live due to its less polished gameplay.

Live 2.0, 3.0

Live has seen two major updates since its release in 2002 with both offering some substantial improvements. Here's a look:

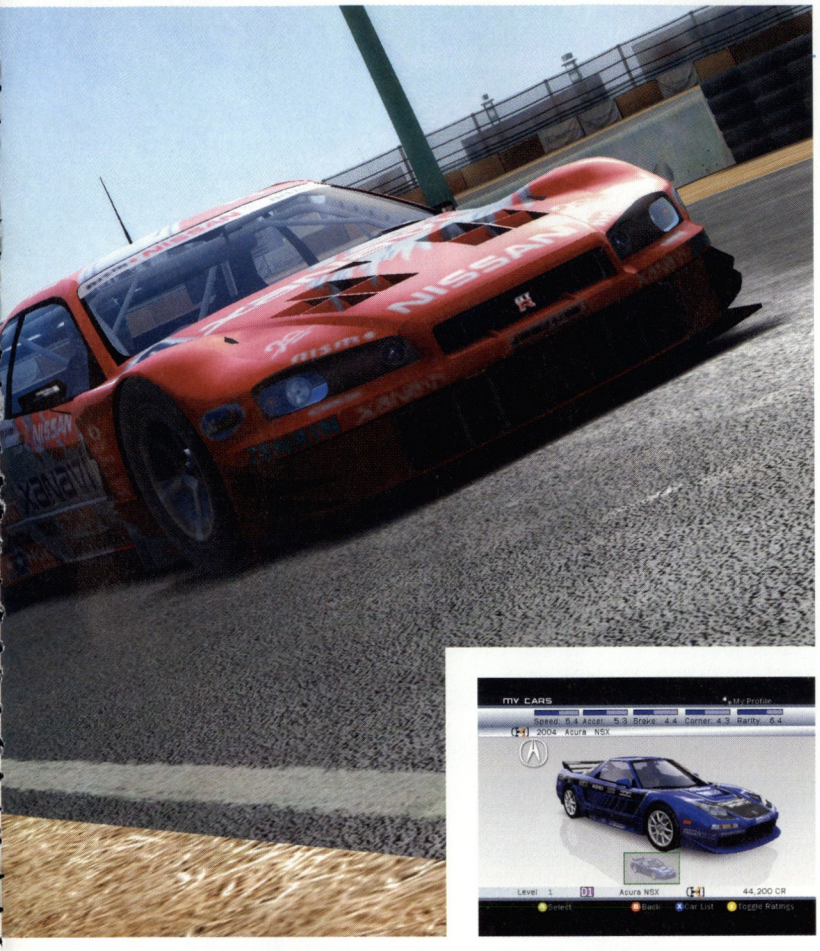
- **Live 2.0 (2003): Cleans up the dashboard allowing you to access your friends list from the main screen and chat with players outside of game sessions.**
- **Live 3.0 (2005): Aimed primarily at group players, this update features some nifty new tricks. User-created competitions, private team lobbies for strategic planning before sessions, clan statistic tracking and the ability to share clan artwork and rosters using online storage. Integration with MSN Messenger also added.**

TOP SPIN ★★★

www.xsnsports.com

This one's an oldie but a goody. An antidote to the piss-easy difficulty level of the single player game, Top Spin on Live is another story altogether. Prepare to master power shots though; most of the better players use these incessantly. Apart from changing the spirit of the game a little, this can be quite intimidating to noobs. It's good, then, that an update was released allowing you to check your opponent's ranking before you start play and choose accordingly.

RACING GAMES



FORZA MOTORSPORT ★★★

http://community.forzamotorsport.net/

This is the grand daddy of Xbox racing games, and the most popular on Live to boot. No surprises really – taking a leaf from Project Gotham Racing 2, Live integrates seamlessly with the single player experience and offers a slew of multiplayer options which are all built on an A-grade driving/racing game engine.

Apart from scoreboards, downloadable ghosts and the ability to set up car clubs (aka car clans), Forza allows the trading of cars over Live between players. It's not only the stock cars which can be traded either; custom cars (with unique paint jobs, decals and aftermarket parts) make up a big part of Forza trading online. And even if you don't trade, the ability show off your custom wheels on the starters grid before the start of a race is an important part of the Forza experience.

THE REST

With up to 12 players in a race at a time, **V8 SUPERCARS 2** ★★★ on Live is a competitors dream. Other than that, V8's Live play is remarkably no-nonsense, offering the usual play modes in a good example of quality over quantity.

BURNOUT 3 TAKEDOWN ★, has all the basics covered with a variety of game modes and integration with single player (allowing you to unlock stuff for play in both single and multiplayer). Susceptibility to lag is a problem as is zoning which prevents cars driving back down a track. Overall Takedown feels shallow online with its lack of more unique multiplayer challenges – c'mon Criterion, haven't you heard of Destruction Derby?

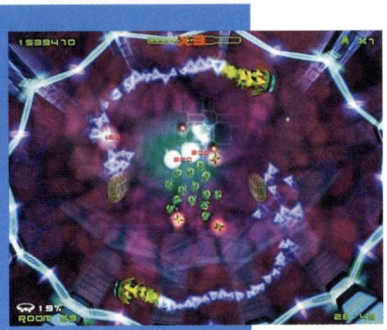
OUTRUN 2 ★★ takes its prancing stallion antics up against eight players to great success. But beware; this is an expert's domain. Without having mastered the subtleties of the powerslide, you'll be pure fodder. Skilled drivers on the other hand, can put their insane drifting skills to the test in some seriously competitive races where only the best powerslider wins.

Both arcade racers **MIDNIGHT CLUB 3 DUB EDITION** ★★ and **NFS UNDERGROUND 2** ★★ work well on Live with a minimum of fuss, and for similar reasons. Midnight Club 3 provides fans with some real driving challenge (versus the game's ridiculously easy single player mode) on the game's main tracks (the extra modes are mere padding and for novelty value only). Underground similarly offers its hip, arcade and rather straight-up racing action up for no-nonsense multiplayer.

Meanwhile, **RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2** ★★, a tragically overlooked rally title, shines on Live. With the ability to set up tournaments with 64 players and season play for 32, there are plenty of ways to play this one online. The ability to replay a stage in season mode again and again before the deadline passes is an interesting twist – and one that brings out the best in rally racers.

Xbox Live Arcade

In a taste of things to come with the next major Live upgrade, Live Arcade is a new service which allows you to download arcade classics to your hard drive for a fee. The good news is that a few of them are brilliant and that you can download demos to decide for yourself. And the bad news? The majority of them are utter rubbish and the asking price is just a wee bit too steep...



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2 ★★★

www.bizarreonline.net

PGR2 was as much about being the killer online app for the then fledgling Xbox Live service as it was about a slick evolution of its predecessor – that is, fast and stylish racing through some brilliantly designed courses.

Featuring stats and leaderboards that load directly into lobby screens, downloadable ghosts and friend list integration into practically every screen, PGR2 is a prime of example of a game designed to make the most of Live.

But it's the porting of the gorgeous driving engine onto Live that makes this one still eminently playable today; blinding fast and lag free.

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Dodo	$49.90	10GB	0.18c / MB	www.dodo.com.au
Dodo	$59.90	15GB	0.18c / MB	www.dodo.com.au
Dodo	$74.90	Unlimited	N/A	www.dodo.com.au
Cyberone	$59.95	Unlimited	N/A	www.cyberone.com.au
Supernerd	$44.95	10GB	0.10c / MB	www.supernerd.com.au
Supernerd	$59.95	Unlimited	Nil	www.supernerd.com.au
Bendigos.net - Lite	$79.95	5GB	10c	www.bendigos.net
Bendigos.net	$89.95	Unlimted	N/A	www.bendigos.net
Wild IT & Internet	$44.95	15GB	shaped	www.wildit.com.au
TPG Regional 512	$49.99	10GB + 500VoIP	shaped	www.tpg.com.au
TPG Regional 512	$49.95	20GB	shaped	www.tpg.com.au
AAPT	$59.95	12GB	Nil	www.aapt.com.au
Tel Pacific - Lite 512	$29.95	200MB	10c MB Capped $55	www.telpacific.com.au
Tel.Pacific - Smart Choice 512	$49.95	Unlimited	Nil	www.telpacific.com.au
TeeGee Internet – Combo	$26.95	3GB	$3.00 per GB	www.teegee.com.au
TeeGee Internet – Standard	$31.95	5GB	$3.00 per GB	www.teegee.com.au
TeeGee Internet – Heavy	$39.95	25GB	$3.00 per GB	www.teegee.com.au
Comcen	$49.95	4GB Peak / 8GB Off Peak	14.9c / MB	www.comcen.com.au
Comcen	$69.95	15GB Peak / 30GB Off Peak	14.9c / MB	www.comcen.com.au
Blue Net	$117.50	5G	8c MB	www.blue.net.au
512K/512kp Plans				
Aztec	$74.75	35GB	shaped	www.aztec.aunz.com
Wild IT & Internet	$79.95	25GB	shaped	www.wildit.com.au
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Tel.Pacific - Smart Choice 1500	$79.95	Unlimited	Nil	www.telpacific.com.au
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Dodo	$99.90	15GB	0.18c / MB	www.dodo.com.au
Dodo	$129.90	Unlimited	N/A	www.dodo.com.au
AAPT	$89.95	12GB	Nil	www.aapt.com.au
Cyberone	$89.95	Unlimited	N/A	www.cyberone.com.au
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iiNet - with iiphone	$69.95	20GB + 20GB	nil	www.iinet.net.au
iiNet	$99.95	20GB + 20GB	Nil	www.iinet.net.au
TeeGee Internet – Light	$64.95	8GB	$3.00 per GB	www.teegee.com.au
TeeGee Internet – Heavy	$79.95	25GB	$3.00 per GB	www.teegee.com.au
TPG Metro 1500	$49.99	8GB + 500VoIP	shaped	www.tpg.com.au
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Westnet	$79.95	20GB	shaped	www.westnet.com.au
Internode - Pro	$89.95	30GB	shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - Elite	$129.95	60GB	shaped	www.internode.com.au
Blue Net	$176.00	5GB	8c MB	www.blue.net.au
ADSL2+ Plans				
iiNet	$89.95	40GB + 40GB	Nil	www.iinet.net.au
Internode - Extreme - Value	$59.95	15GB	shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - Extreme - Pro	$79.95	30GB	shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - Extreme - Elite	$119.95	60GB	shaped	www.internode.com.au
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SANDISK MEMORY

RRP: $89.95 - $339 / WWW.SANDISK.COM

Sony like to tout the PSP as an all in one solution for movies, games, music and photo viewing but don't really follow through when you consider that the basic unit only ships with a 32MB memory stick – enough to save a few games but not enough to hold much downloadable content or more than maybe 4/5 songs. Sure Sony have larger capacity memory sticks but they also charge Sony sized prices for them. Enter SanDisk with an affordable (though still not cheap) memory stick solution that's colourful to boot! The SanDisk game cards range in size from 128MB at a price point of $89.95 through to a 1GB model valued at $339. A 2GB model is also planned for release in the coming months. Although $339 is a large pile of cash to lay down after purchasing the not inexpensive PSP, 1GB of memory is enough to turn your handheld gaming platform into a viable MP3/Media player and that's not too bad at all.

PSP PERIPHERALS

RRP: TBA / WWW.JOYTECH.COM

With the release of the PSP it's only natural that third party peripherals for the handheld are going to be making their way to us. Unlike the vast majority of third party peripherals for consoles which usually take the form of bad controllers, lightguns you'll never use and overpriced LCD screens in a vague attempt to make them portable, the PSP peripherals are great and by and large useful.

Joytech are releasing a number of hard and soft cases for carrying the handheld, ranging from a deluxe version with pockets for games and memory sticks through to a hard Perspex case designed to be clipped on and left on. Other peripherals include an in car charger that hooks into the cigarette lighter, and docking stations for simultaneously watching movies and charging your PSP.

HARD CASE

USB ADAPTOR

EARPHONES

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60 Total Overdose

Almost as cool as an armoured polar bear fighting ninjas on a zeppelin

Reviews

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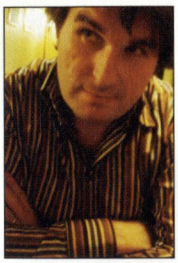
Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

Viva La...



Someone say something about a Revolution? Oh wait, not very much at all actually. The naysayers suggest Nintendo have made a mistake in being late to the table for next generation details and keeping information releases to a minimum. But then there does seem to be a general inclination toward underestimating the company, as though history is only as long as the last few years.

For the more observant, Nintendo's Revolution strategy is aimed at delivering on a marketing campaign that gives the fans what they really want. Right now, they're keeping tight-lipped and in marketing terms, they're under promising. By erring on the side of caution at such an early stage, they cannot do anything but over deliver on their fundamental initiatives. Smart marketers everywhere know that this is the way to send the fans into a renewed Nintendo fervour.

By making the Revolution a mystery, every curious party has hyped the machine through guesswork and hypothesis. This can only build interest toward an eventual true launch. Compare this with the hype from Sony and Microsoft, who have only given critics ample opportunity to uncover problems — or even for themselves to have to back track from earlier promises. Microsoft have even started talking about Xbox 360 updates to next gen disc formats. Is this seriously the way to win favour with the fans?

Of all the Revolution's hinted plans, the new controller has generated a blaze of online speculation, with 'artistic renditions' of possible designs spanning the four corners of the web. It would be wrong to doubt the authenticity of their claim of a true shift in controller design. Let's not forget it is Nintendo who have been the innovators in controllers, from the D-pad to the analogue stick they've shaped the future we now play in.

While the 'other two' are talking about owning the living room, Nintendo are remaining humble in their quest to offer an exciting game machine. In the process, Sony and Microsoft might be moving in search of larger audiences, but Nintendo's focus remains mindful of the need to deliver top quality gameplay above all else.

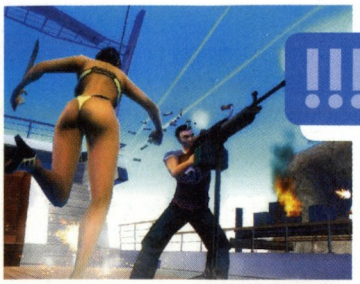
Nintendo's promise of access to their back catalogue speaks volumes on a commitment to smart use of online experience and distribution. Anyone who argues they wouldn't be attracted to online access to everything Nintendo has to offer should hand in their gamer credentials.

Game releases benefit from launch hype more than a console. There will still be a marked boost to penetration with a well hyped console, but that console still needs to convince punters to part with their big dollars and feel comfortable in their commitment to the platform. All the pre-hype in the world cannot cover up the reality that hits come the time the console is on the shelf ready to take home. It is this fact that Nintendo seems to have a better handle on than their competitors at this stage in the race. Expect to hear more as the Xbox 360 hits its launch date, but don't be surprised if you don't hear much — just enough to whet the appetite without going over the top.

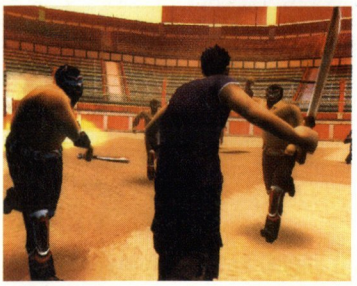
The Nintendo 64 took gaming somewhere fresh when it arrived. But somehow in the years since people believe Nintendo have lost what it takes. The GameCube may not have won the current generation war, but there is no mistaking that Iwata, Miyamoto and the gang have what it takes to pull out the proverbial drawing board and take us somewhere new once again. So far we've seen a simple, elegant case design, perhaps pointing toward a back to fundamentals approach to their attack on the next generation.

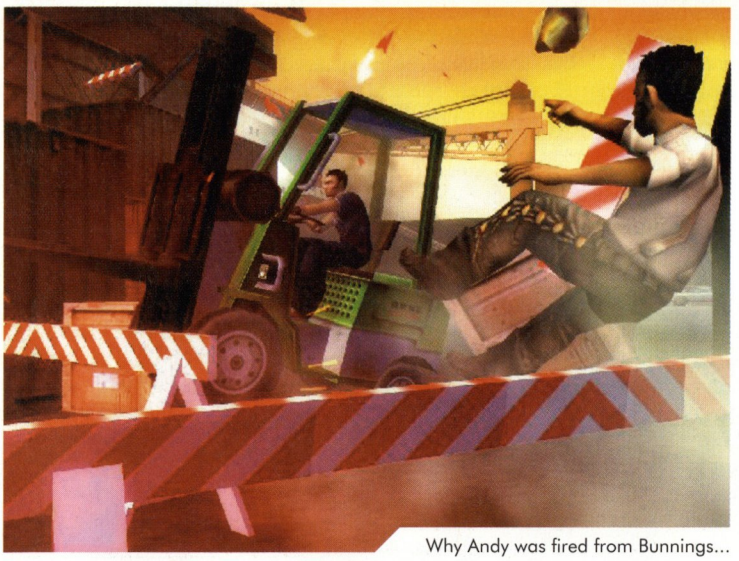
THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about?

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
As stinky as a wet sock that's been worn for days by a festering troll...	As pungent as milk that's two months past its used by date	Like imitation perfume - nice at first but quickly losing its scent	Like the smell of a freshly baked pie that your friend farted near	The intoxicating and heady aroma of gameplay fills the air from these	If there is a heaven it will smell something like this

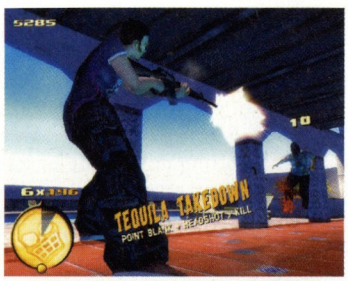


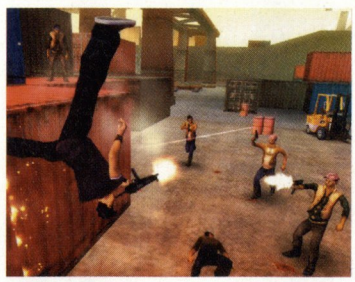
!!! The soundtrack features Molotov, Delinquent Habits and Control Machete.

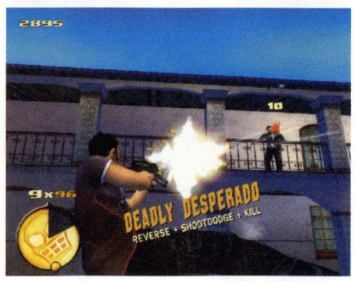




Why Andy was fired from Bunnings...







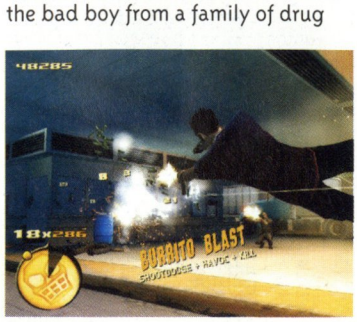
TOTAL OVERDOSE

SEAMUS BYRNE has fun for the sake of fun...

Rarely does a name speak so directly to a game's content. From the intro video (hell, even from the company credits) to the final shoot out, you're sucked straight into a killer experience that combines Robert Rodriguez at his Mexican gun fest best and some of John Woo's Hard Boiled, with a healthy influence from Burnout's driving style and Tony Hawk's combo system.

CRUZ FOR A BRUISE

You take on the role of Ramiro Cruz, the bad boy from a family of drug cops who've experienced the death of the father and the crippling of the brother at the hands of Mexican drug barons. Ramiro has been pulled out of the big house to go in undercover and tear up the crime lords as only he knows how. The story and setting are wonderfully over the top in their stereotypes, helping to really sell the hyper-dramatic gameplay. You almost think the game should come in a value pack with some tequila and shot glasses.



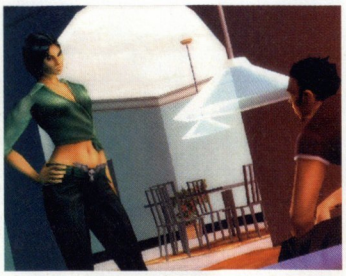
From the moment you grab the controls the game kicks into a no holds barred unadulterated action fest. The controls are easy to get a handle on and in no time at all you find yourself cartwheeling through the air in bullet time, pulling off head shots and mouthing off at bad guys as you take them out.

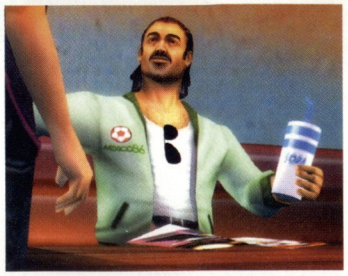
The bullet time 'shootdodge' system gives you the Max Payne slow mo moments to carve your way to wiping out all the low lifes, with far less limitation on how much of this you can use. There is an adrenaline meter that measures this, but it restores very quickly so you can keep jumping into this mode with ease — and many of the coolest moves in the game are all about this mode.

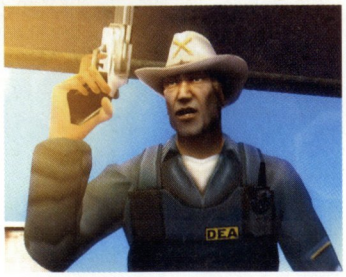
You can also score rewinds to further play with time management. Like Prince of Persia, you can slide backward through time by around ten seconds. But again, you can use this with much more utility here and you gain some health to help make sure you're not walking into the same death trap moments later.

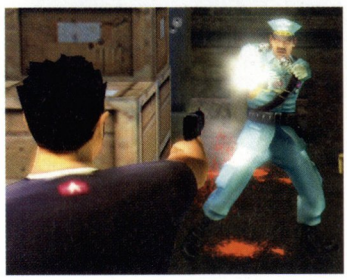
Probably the coolest part of the game that really pulls all these options together is the kick ass Spicy Moves list. The game is constantly calling out named moves based on the stylish kills you pull off. There's the Fly On The Wall, for when you pull of a headshot while doing a cartwheel shootdodge off a wall; or a Gringo Frenzy when you blow something up and kill people in the blast; or, our favourite, when you shootdodge out of a car and pull off a headshot while still in the air, you get an Angry Sunday Driver.

Speaking of which, when you drive in Total Overdose you always drive angry. Cars are bombs on wheels, just as nature intended. While hooning around you can run people down and even keep shooting while you drive. You can do some great stunt driving too, by hanging out of the door while you drive — do your best to take out some henchmen with the door while you're there — and dive out into a shootdodge at the last moment before your explosion on wheels hits its target.

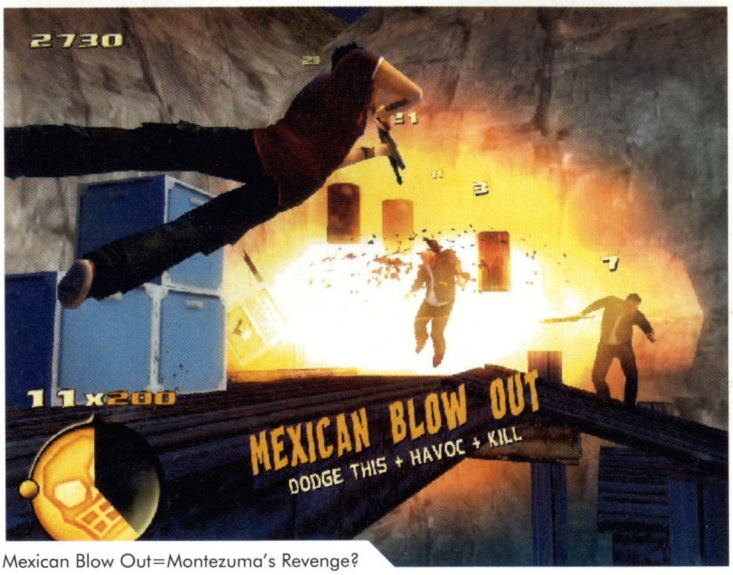








Sexy Girls with Sexy Guns volume 6



Mexican Blow Out=Montezuma's Revenge?

CUNNING STUNTS

The combo system wants you to link your kills together to score bonus points. The more kills you string together, the more rewards you pick up along the way. The points go toward mission rewards too, such as extra rewinds, dual wielding guns, and sweet, sweet Loco Moves.

Loco Moves add that extra touch of pure insanity to the mix, allowing you to pull off seriously crazy kill sequences when you're in the midst of trouble. There's the Golden Gun, for one-shot kills; the Tornado, for taking out every bad guy in the immediate area; El Mariachi makes you invulnerable while you get to dual wield guitar case machine guns; and the Sombrero of Death summons a Mexican day of the dead skeleton with a rocket launcher to help lay some smackdown. There are seven in all, and once tasted you lust for more — a healthy nudge onward to help pull off more combos and fancy kills to build the reward pool. With a maximum of two of each at any time, these aren't for saving either. And by using them, you'll start scoring more Loco Moves! A vicious circle of glorious death for your enemies.

There is a mix of story missions and challenge missions to work your way through, with everything linked together through the city of Los Toros. This is where the game gets its GTA style screenshots from, but the city isn't nearly as expansive as GTA. Instead, the idea is to get from one mission to another easily, and to get plenty of access to challenge missions when you want to take them on. The city does offer some navigation problems, but with its focus on skipping the boring stuff, you can jump into the mission menu at any time to cut to the chase and start the next mission right away. Now and then this can be a little confusing, as you're not sure where you've just jumped to, but for the most part this is a great way to get with the guns.

One of the stand out touches for Total Overdose is the music, with some stellar Mexican hip hop that fits perfectly with the tone of the game. Combined with the general graphic style that is all about a cool, slick and sexy game world, you just want to keep pushing onward.

Total Overdose may be single player, but it's still a great party game. It's awesome to see others pull off moves you've never seen before (there are more than 40 unique Spicy Moves) and pushing for bigger and bigger combos. To put it simply - get this game. Your machine is hungry for its nourishing goodness. <<

LOCO MOVES ADD THAT EXTRA TOUCH OF INSANITY TO THE MIX, ALLOWING YOU TO PULL OFF CRAZY KILLS

>> **STREET SMARTS** When you've completed the story, you can jump back to any mission you like to try and beat your mission scores and look to rack up maximum combos. Many levels are designed so you can string together every kill on the map — word on the street is the maximum combo is around 120x. Serious non-stop carnage ahoy!

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Deadline Games
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: September 16

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Pure fun, great special moves, damn funny.

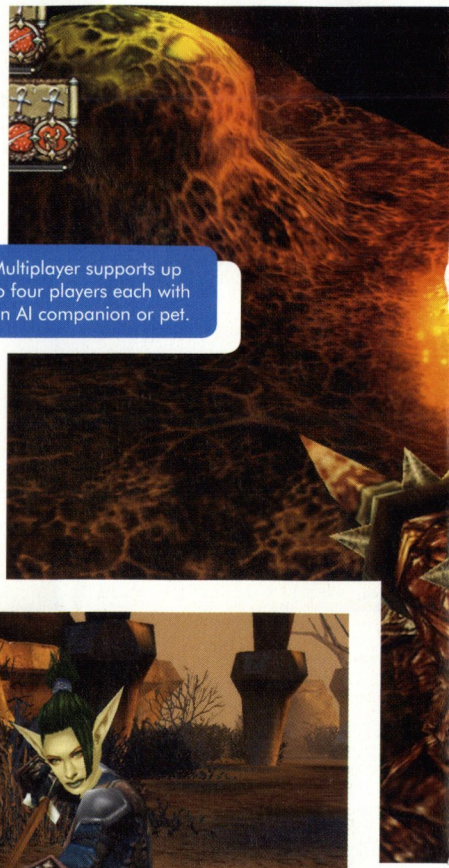
MINUS: City maps are confusing at times.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	94	95

OVERALL
94

Super crazy gun-toting tequila slammer of the highest order.

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL



Multiplayer supports up to four players each with an AI companion or pet.

Need a bow to match the ears

DUNGEON SIEGE II

DANIEL WILKS needs his subhead examined...

When Dungeon Siege came out a few years ago we, the games press were pretty much universally taken in by the incredible streaming engine. We were so impressed that many of us glossed over the fact that the actual game was not as impressive as the technology or modding potential. Not that Dungeon Siege was a bad game just that it was a little, shall we say, limited in terms of scope, consisting mostly of very narrow corridors leading to a climactic boss battle. Dungeon Siege II, the sequel, is easily a superior game in all aspects. Not only is the engine as clever and stunning as ever, the actual game is pretty damn good as well.

BUT IS HE EMBIGGENED?

Truth be told, the story isn't one of the most compelling ever seen in a game but then again when has the plot ever been the main driving element of an action RPG? In Dungeon Siege II players take the role of a mercenary seriously wronged by his employer setting out for bloody revenge and becoming both humanised and ennobled along the way.

Naturally, as is the case of nearly any game that takes fantasy as the genre basis, the protagonist of Dungeon Siege II has an unknown birthright and a grand destiny.

As well as the main through plot, DSII also features numerous subquests and side stories ranging from helping a woman find a memento to remember her daughter through to learning how to talk to the ghosts that litter the land. The progression of these side quests is such that players will have to back track to areas they have been before when they have reached a high enough level or gathered the skills necessary to complete the quest, making for some great exploration and a sense that you are playing in a world rather than a loosely connected series of corridors.

In keeping with the new quest structure, levels in Dungeon Siege II are much larger and more open than those seen in the original game. Each new area features multiple places to explore including numerous caves, buildings and dungeons. Multiple paths run through the levels so players actually need to look around for things to do instead of simply following the path to the next quest vendor. Whilst the level design is markedly different from the first game, the gameplay remains very similar. Left clicking on an object or area will move the character or activate the object and right clicking attacks a target or uses a special skill. Keeping the right mouse button down causes the character to continue attacking the target. Whilst this isn't much of a change

Bad case of crabs (boom tish)

A fantasy form of "Stupid Ring Theory"

LEVELS FEATURE MULTIPLE PATHS SO PLAYERS ACTUALLY HAVE TO LOOK AROUND FOR THINGS TO DO

from multiple clicks as in Diablo, the fact that in many fights all you will be doing is monitoring your party's health and mana and hitting the relevant potion hotkeys makes the combat (the bulk of the game) feel a bit passive at times. The leveling system from the first game that rewards players for sticking to one style of play such as melee or nature magic remains so it's important to decide on what sort of character you wish to play from the outset or otherwise your character will wind up seriously underpowered.

ACQUISITION RPGS

Dungeon Siege, Diablo and other games of that ilk are most often called Action RPGs but we prefer to think of them as games of acquisition – games in which the primary goal of the player is to find bigger and better items to use to kill tougher enemies to in turn find bigger and better items. In terms of item drops, Dungeon Siege II comes out trumps. The rate of item drops is excellent and the range will keep you interested as well. Aside from normal magic items, Dungeon Siege II features numerous item sets that become steadily more powerful as you equip more pieces of the set as well as a staggering number of unique items that are rightfully coveted.

The engine is far from being as beautiful as Source or Doom 3 but it does the job well, rendering some great looking areas, and well animated and nicely varied monsters. The engine scales nicely and is able to zoom far out or zoom in for a nice close up with only the occasional dull texture or seam. The soundtrack is suitably stirring and high fantasy (listen to it and you'll understand there is no better term) but the voice acting on the other hand is horrible with dueling accents, terrible timing and some instances that hint to us that the people reading had been sick on the day that they were meant to be taught punctuation. <<

>> PARTY OF SIX Players don't have to slog their way through the adventure alone. Up to five others can be recruited into the party (with a maximum of three in the first play through). The extra characters function much the same way as they did in the original game providing healing, extra melee characters and the like but this time around the option to have pets has been added. Instead of functioning as a humanoid NPC, the growth of pets is controlled by what the player feeds the pet. Pets eat items to develop and gain skills depending on their food source – feed a melee pet weapons and armour and they will gain extra attack powers and armour, feed them spells and jewelry and they may develop a spell like power.

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

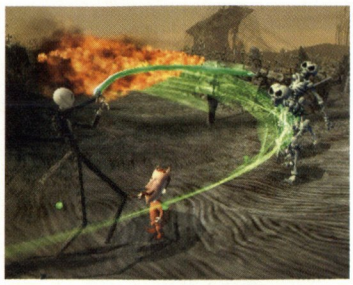
PLUS: Big, great engine, good side quests.

MINUS: Repetitive.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	84	86

OVERALL
86

Doesn't out Diablo Diablo II but comes mighty close.



!!! We can't wait for Tim Burton's The Corpse Bride.

Don't wipe your nose on your sleeve

Jack Skellington going through DTs

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

DANIEL WILKS writes his reviews in stop motion

It seems a little odd for a company like Capcom to create a game based sequel to a cult hit, though only marginally commercially successful animated film, 12 years after the film's release but here we have it with The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge. A sequel of sorts to the movie, Oogie's Revenge takes place a year or so after the movie, with Jack Skellington, the Mayor of Halloween Town returning from a journey he took to find himself and reinvigorate his love for his holiday. In his absence, Oogie Boogie, the villain from the film – an anthropomorphic Hessian sack filled with bugs – has managed to unsquish himself and sew his sack back together and has been holding Halloween Town in his vice like sacky grip, with the help of his childish henchpersons, Lock, Shock and Barrel as well as a bunch of respawning ghouls, ghosts, skeletons and what have you.

NOSE GOBLINS

The Nightmare Before Christmas plays something like a Fischer Price "My First Devil May Cry". It uses the same engine as the famous series and feels very similar for the most part. This is not a bad thing. It makes the game readily accessible to action fans and fans of the movie alike.

Jack is equipped, in his basic form with the Rubber Soul, a melee weapon that functions as both a whip and a grapple and looks something like a long rope of snot. Aside from simple hits, Jack can grab enemies and bash them into the ground or other enemies, catch projectiles and throw them back and grapple to high points. Later in the game Jack learns the ability to transform into two alternate forms, each with differing powers. The Pumpkin King form allows Jack to breathe fire for short amounts of time to burn down structures or fight multiple enemies and Santa Jack gives Skellington a similar control over ice and cold.

Where Nightmare really differs from other similar action games is in the frequent boss battles. In keeping with the musical nature of the movie, boss battles are essentially rhythm games. Jack first needs to hit the boss enough times to fill up his music meter and then will launch into a song and dance routine that requires the player to move the thumbstick in the right sequence and press the right button at the right time. The number of perfect or good sequences you can pull off does a corresponding amount of damage to the boss. The battles are rather charming as a result and remain fun throughout the game, though it can become more than a little draining to hear the same song for what seems to be forever if you screw up a rhythm sequence and have to charge your music meter again.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PUBLISHER: Capcom
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: September 30

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Charming, accessible, great voice work.

MINUS: Not the original voice actors/singers.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81	92	83

OVERALL
82

The fans of the film will be pleased – very playable.

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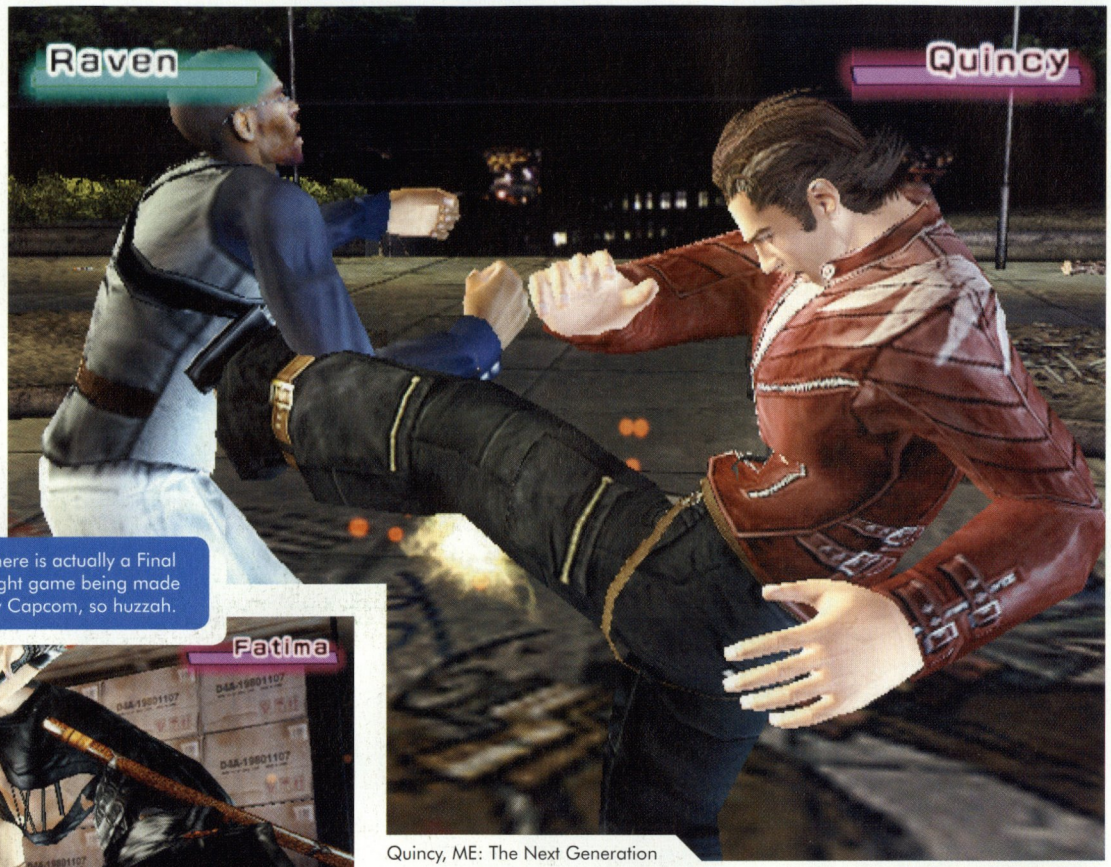

Quincy, ME: The Next Generation

!!! There is actually a Final Fight game being made by Capcom, so huzzah.

Showdown in the crate factory

BEATDOWN: Fists of Vengeance

DANIEL WILKS wants him some hot Haggar action

For a long time I've been moaning about the lack of a decent Final Fight style game for the current generation. I say this not only because of a bit of man love for the irrepressible Mike Haggar, the guy that made muscle-bound politicians cool long before Jesse "The Mind" Ventura abseiled from a helicopter into his official office or Ahnold flexed his way into power, riding on his platform of being the bulletproof Kennedy and crazy Japanese advertisements. It's not just because Cody went on to become one of the crappiest Streeties characters and looked like he was wearing floppy pajamas into battle and Guy... well, the less said about him the better. It's because Final Fight was just a hell of a lot of fun. Beating up punks and punkish chicks who give you a little fan-service when you smack them right is a man's pursuit. A pastime worthy of nobility.

MAKING A MESS

Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance is not in the same league. That said it's still quite a playable little mess but a mess it is nonetheless. In a hit and miss attempt at revitalising the side scrolling beat 'em up genre, Beatdown not only gives players a reason to engage in acts of extreme fustigation but gives the five playable characters back-stories and worse still, personalities. Well, personalities may be taking it a little too far but here's who you can choose from: Jason G, the manly man biker with a steely jaw, steelier gaze and steeliest libido, Raven, an emo mobster who isn't nearly as cool as his namesake from Snow Crash, Aaron, a big pimpin' dude, Lola, the stereotypically sassy Latina and Gina, a topless dancer who may or may not specialise in fatal lap-dances. Each has different attack and defense attributes as well as a varying amount of cash on hand, all of which come into play during the game.

Players spend most of their time switching between roaming the city, trying to say out of the way of the cops and a vindictive drug gang trying to make money and performing story missions. Throughout play, players are able to purchase new gang members to increase the size of their posse and have more able backup in a fight as well as buy new combat moves and outfits. The fighting engine for Beatdown veers from pretty good to pretty bad depending on the situation and how friendly the camera feels like being at any given moment. Battles are broken up into basic thugs and bosses. Thugs attack en-mass but can be taken out with relative ease. Bosses on the other hand switch to an almost conventional fighting game for tougher one on one battles. The engine looks a little dated but some of the character design and costumes are so outlandishly cool that it's rather charming. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action/Fighting
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Cavia
PUBLISHER: Capcom
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: September

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Attempted depth, gang wars.

MINUS: Voice acting, soundtrack, erratic.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	62	76

OVERALL
74

Still waiting for a viable successor to Final Fight.

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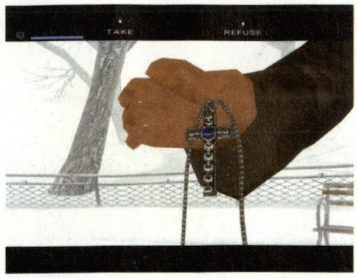
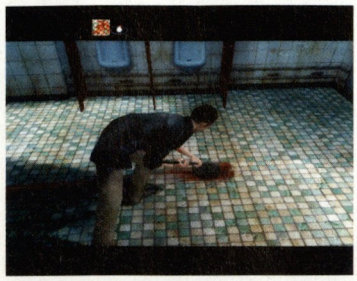
MARVEL

Getting a "feel" for the crime scene. Eeww





FAHRENHEIT

SEAMUS BYRNE likes it hot hot hot...

Before sitting down to play Fahrenheit, I was definitely unsure of how this game was going to pull its ideas together into a cohesive experience. Having been demoed the game a month or so ago by David Cage, its writer/director, there was no doubting his team's commitment to the concept, but it was difficult to gauge how the gameplay would fully engage the player in the way Cage was suggesting it would. Now sitting on the other side of this cinematic wonder, I want to go back in time to shake his hand in congratulations. This game is hot.

LUCAS KANE IS EMO

Or should I say cool? Fahrenheit is set in the midst of a major cold snap in Manhattan and when you start the game you find yourself in control of Lucas Kane, a man who has just murdered someone but clearly doesn't know why the hell he's just done it. A short time later, you're in control of two detectives, Carla Valenti and Tyler Myles, at the crime scene sniffing around for clues in the hunt for the killer. These are the three characters you control through the course of the game. The idea of playing both the man on the run and his pursuers works really well here, as the story is ultimately a supernatural mystery, so it is through the combined efforts of both sides that the underlying happenings will be revealed.

The story is an entertaining one, bringing together a mix of ideas influenced by the likes of The X-Files. Some laughs are on offer too, largely from Tyler Miles, the hip blaxploitation throwback detective, as well as some amusing character clichés — like the old blind person who 'sees all' and the archetypal angry police chief. From the beginnings in a New York diner, the story plays out well through the various points of view and leaping into some flashback gameplay to boot, all leading to the discovery of epic prophecies and conspiracies. It's a lot of fun and is paced nicely, keeping you moving forward and never feeling like you're in a flat grind spot of the game. This is the best attempt at the idea of the interactive movie we've ever played. The pacing, the style, the music — even the voice acting does a really good job of maintaining the cinematic atmosphere and draw you into the story.

When rough trade goes bad

The truly amazing part of this game is its unique controls that help take the game beyond the adventure game traditions and toward something pushing into very new territory — the Quantic Dream claim that this breaks into a new 'Interactive Drama' territory isn't just some pitch for attention. This is all very new.

The action system is based around two very original control schemes that really deliver a great medium between direct character control and simple passive character directing. The most prevalent is a system based around the dual analogue controllers, featuring a pair of circles overlayed on the action taking place. These circles are broken into four colour quadrants. As they light, you have to shift the appropriate analogue stick in the direction indicated. It's easier to follow in practice than describe, and it works very well in play. The other style of control is the demand for physical effort through fast left-right tapping of the triggers or shoulders. There is a meter you have to get up as high as possible and keep there while your character on screen struggles

Interactive movies have been tried many times before. Remember all the bad attempts at the idea when the CD-ROM first arrived? Plenty of FMV turned up at the time, though at generally bad quality as VGA was still king. Phantasmagoria got plenty of media attention for its sexualised violence — glad those debates are behind us, eh? The seven-disc X-Files game from the late 90s cashed in on the fandom of the time, but in the last five years there really hasn't been much to talk about. With adventure in general on a big decline, it's nice to see Quantic step up and deliver something special to offer the industry a new framework for interactive story concepts.

"Gentlemen, to evil"

with an activity, like pushing against some infernal wind or swinging out of the bottom of a helicopter.

STICK MOVEMENTS

There is nothing simple about these sections of the game. Fast sequences of as many as a dozen stick movements may be required to succeed in a particular moment and one sequence in particular demands you keep delivering successes across more than fifty of these moments in a row. We're talking about a real demand for perfection here that is hard to nail and you feel a real sense of achievement when you finally make it through. You're also watching through these semi-transparent circles as the very cinematic action moments as they unfold. When you succeed you see your character pulling off awesome moves that would simply not be possible through any direct control scheme — sliding under, jumping over or dodging cars; taking down police officers and even dodging bullets.

The analogue stick movements aren't just arbitrary either. They actually mirror the characters movements, so you get a sense of direct involvement.

Another big part of the game is the character emotional state. Each of the lead characters can be 'killed' by becoming so overwrought with the events taking place that they just give up and either quit the police force or top themselves. It can be easier to lose points than gain them at times, so you need to tread carefully and act quickly to ensure you keep your guys as happy as possible. There are side challenges that can help, like playing guitar or working out.

THE IDEA OF PLAYING BOTH THE MAN ON THE RUN AND HIS PURSUERS WORKS REALLY WELL HERE

You have to act quickly at all times, as the game pushes a 'real time' experience within each section. If you stand around, you will get served. In conversations with other characters, you have very limited time to choose your topics and you'll often only get one or two chances to question someone. You'll actually miss out on some options, so you need to choose quickly and carefully.

This also ties in to the 'rubber band' story concept. You can approach every part of the game in different ways and this will influence the way future sections of the game play out. There are actually a number of ways the final scenes can play out and when you're done you can jump back to any chapter of your choice to replay it with different choices, making for plenty of replay entertainment value as you'll notice a lot of occasions where you could have done things differently the first time through.

Not that things would need to be all that different to want to play again. Fahrenheit plays so well you'll come back and play again later on anyway. Like coming back to watch a movie you like again. It is a well polished experience — I've used that word a lot, but this really is an 'experience' — with art direction and sound on par with a good film. This is a game that every serious gamer should get their hands on. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Quantic Dream
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: $89.95 PS2, Xbox, $79.95 PC
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: September 16

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Intuitive, original controls, unique game experience.

MINUS: Minor camera issues.

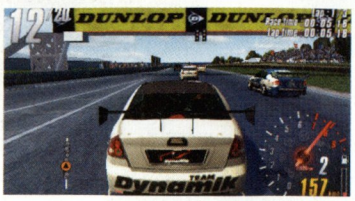
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
87	89	94

OVERALL
93

A cinematic adventure mystery that breaks new ground.

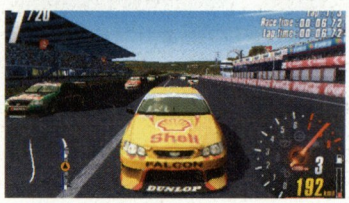
HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

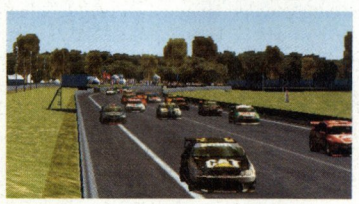
Ford and Holden, together at last, again



!!! Also coming soon to the PSP from Codemasters is Colin McRae Rally 2005. We should have a full review next issue.

I wanna be sponsored by DecoRug!





V8 SUPERCARS 2

It's easy to get distracted by the sheer and simple fact that V8 Supercars 2 on the PSP is a near-perfect conversion of the same PS2 racing sim that graced our consoles last year. But that would be missing the point: at a time when arcade racers dominate the PSP with the promise of fast and furious racing action, V8 2 arrives wearing its racing sim intentions proudly on its sleeve. More importantly, it proves that this type of racer can work on the PSP, and work splendidly.

PETROL(SUB)HEAD

V8 Supercars 2 is about the art of racing itself. The magic is a result of a strong supporting cast of game systems and smart design choices. Most courses aren't ten-lane-wide affairs with plenty of room to bounce through; the majority adhere to realistic real-world layouts with plenty of blind corners and narrow sections of track. With car AI that does its best to block your overtake route throughout a race, you'll have to work hard and smart to take the chequered flag. Of course, the addition of damage modelling makes the whole affair that much more thrilling – ramming into a car or piece of the track will invariably damage your car and stymie your chances of a win. To top it all off, developer Sumo Digital has managed to cram all 21 opponents into the same race. Magic stuff.

What makes this sort of gruelling racing work on the PSP is the overall structure of the game. The massive single player component of Supercars 2 is broken down into a bunch of bite-sized chunks. Most races are two lap affairs, ranging from a few minutes up to the ten minute mark. This is exactly the sort of game you'd pull out on a train or bus for a few moments and still manage to get off at the right stop.

And it's all here: over 50 courses, 30 championships and 15 or so motor sports to play around with, so if you thought this game was only all about Holden vs Ford then you've got it all wrong. There's plenty to sink your teeth into. For returning fans and those who want more of a personal challenge, you can choose your own race variables (want a 50 lapper? Plug in your AC adapter and go!), and there is wireless multiplayer (ad-hoc only) to indulge in with a whopping maximum of 12 players in the same session. We haven't yet come even close to 12 PSPs with V8 Supercars 2 in a same place same time scenario, so sorry, no reports on the stability offered when running at full spec.

The only real gripe with Supercars 2 is the controls. Sumo Digital offers varying degrees of nub sensitivity, but even still it's a difficult tool to work with. For a game that requires such precise control, the nub just feels too clumsy. The d-pad, on the other hand, works well in a Gran Turismo sorta way, allowing for easy minor adjustments on the road. Sumo Digital has done some great work in making the digital controls work with acceleration and braking in context on the track however, and it's not long before car control becomes a transparent process.

V8 Supercars 2 and the PSP are a splendid match. Like a good number of the first generation PSP titles V8 Supercars 2 is fairly straightforward port and a perfect example of adjust-ware, so it's hard to recommend to existing owners of the game. Looking forward and barring any catastrophe, the real trick will be choosing the right format for V8 Supercars 3; the PSP does this game sweet, sweet justice.

Newcomers to the series - you lucky buggers, you – will experience the series afresh. V8 Supercars 2 is simply fantastic.

March Stepnik

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Racing Sim
PLAYERS: 1-12
DEVELOPER: Sumo Digital
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

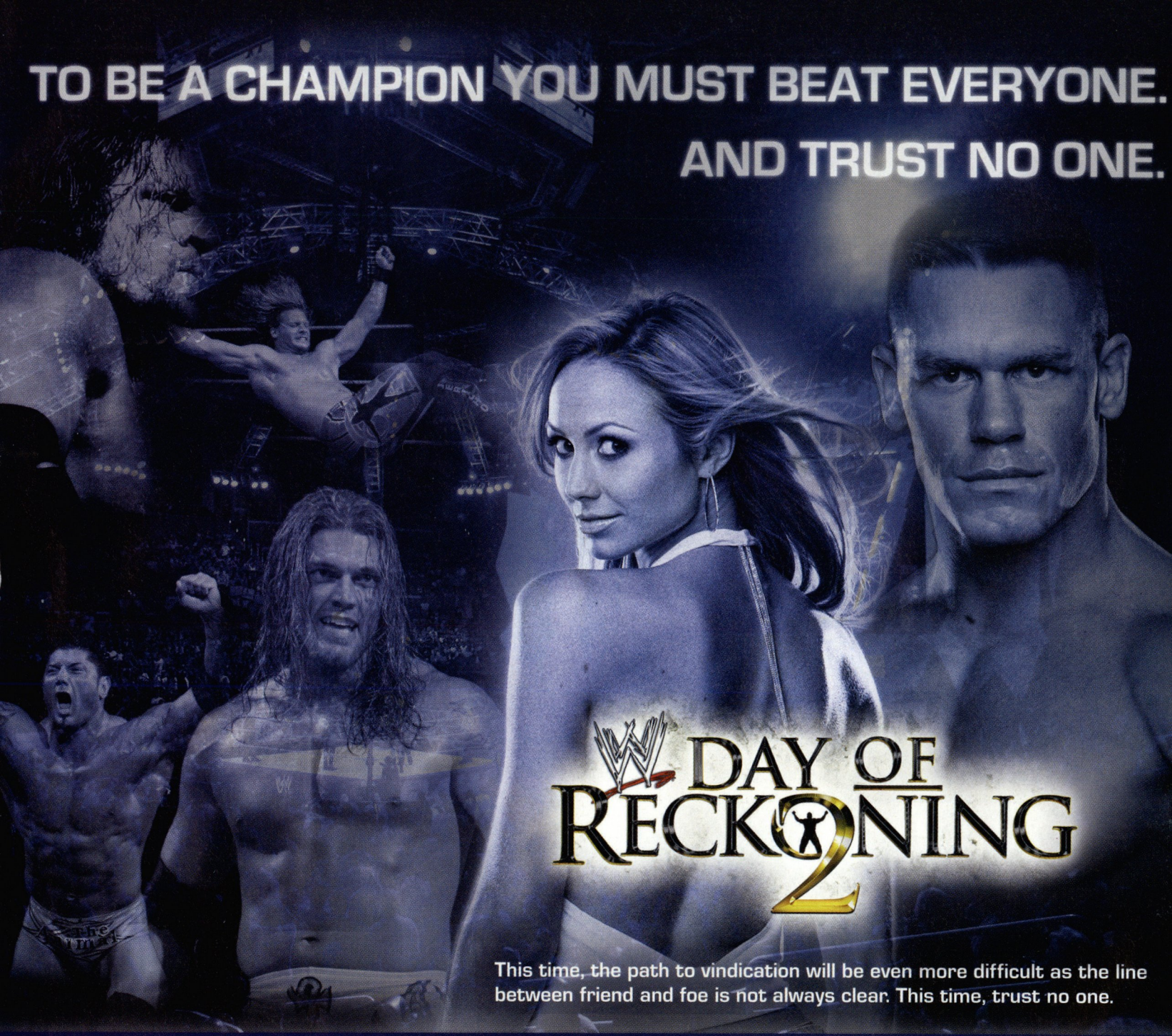
HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	85	91

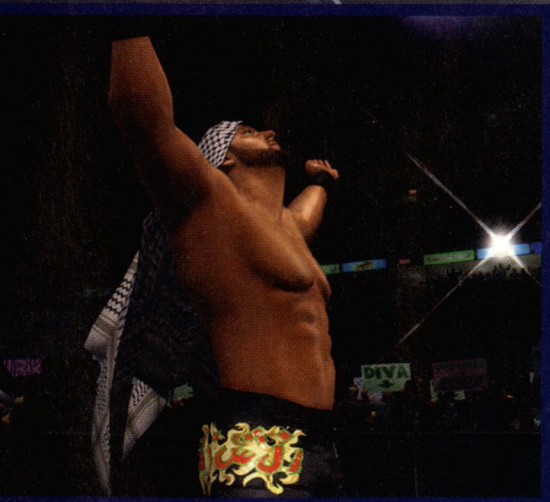
OVERALL
90

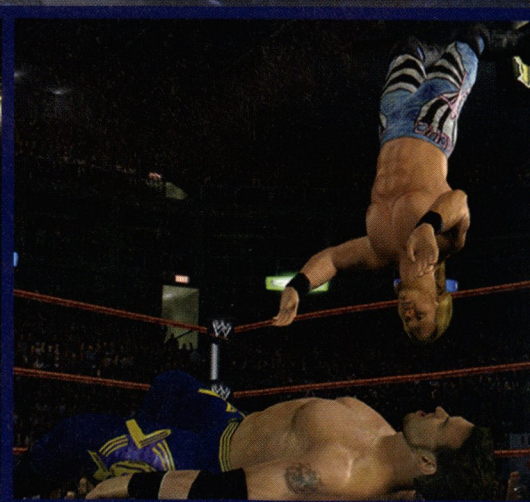
TO BE A CHAMPION YOU MUST BEAT EVERYONE.

AND TRUST NO ONE.



This time, the path to vindication will be even more difficult as the line between friend and foe is not always clear. This time, trust no one.





Moderate violence

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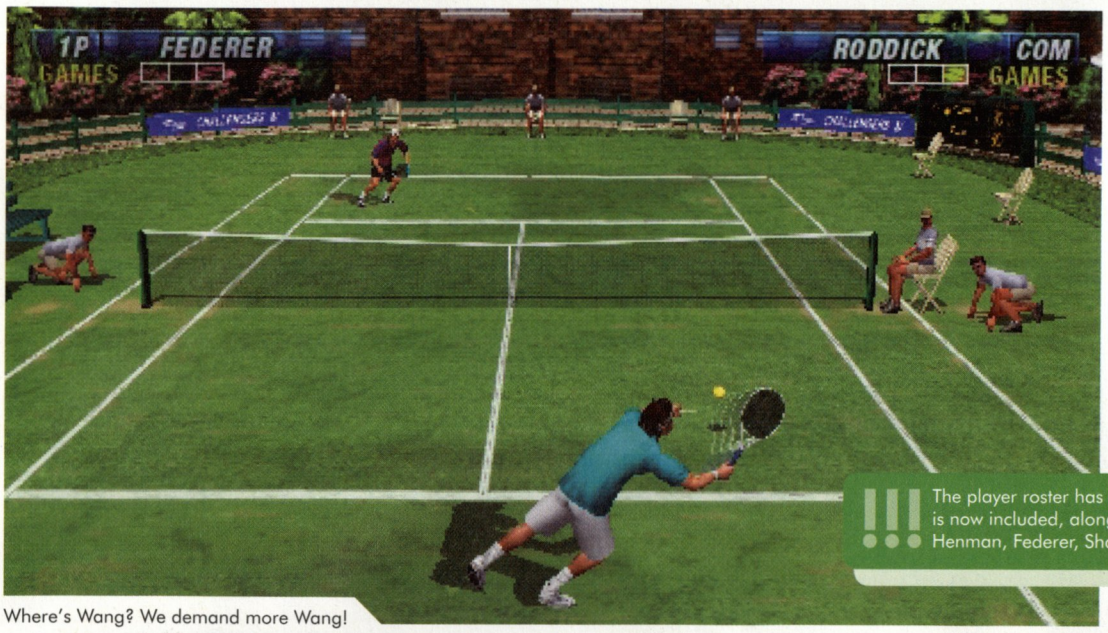
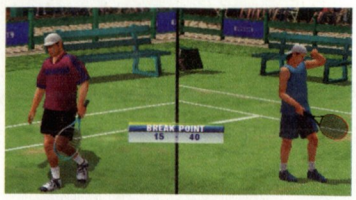
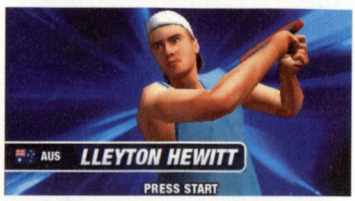
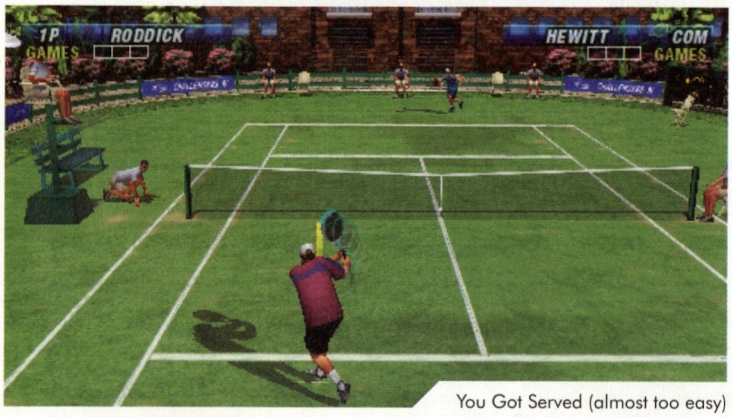


Where's Wang? We demand more Wang!

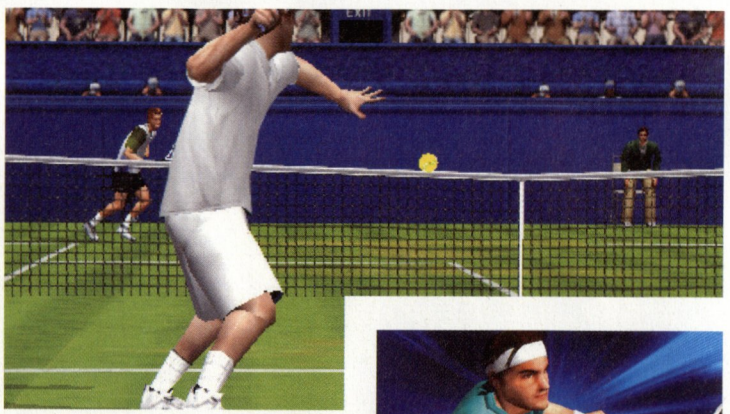


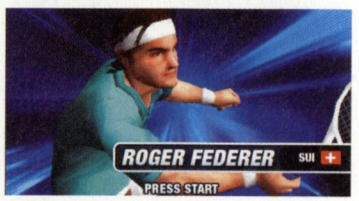


!!! The player roster has changed for this edition. "Our" Lleyton is now included, alongside the likes of Roddick, Ferrero, Henman, Federer, Sharapova, Davenport and Venus Williams.



You Got Served (almost too easy)





VIRTUA TENNIS: World Tour

I doubt any of you would be under any grand illusions about Virtua Tennis: World Tour. Most likely, you'll be expecting Virtua Tennis 2 on a portable with the inclusion of Wi-Fi play and maybe a bonus doohicky or two. Well guess what? You're completely right. Virtua Tennis: World Tour is exactly what we expected, and although that's fun enough, it's hard not to be a little disappointed.

PORTY PORTENSTEIN

The crux of the matter is that a few changes would have gone a long way to giving this game greater longevity for the solo player, and they're exactly the same problems that were present back when Virtua Tennis 2 came out on PS2 (see issue III). Perhaps the chief among these is that while the World Tour mode, where you create a male and female player and improve their stats, ranking and equipment as they train and win tournaments, looks good on the surface, ultimately it's a frustrating experience. There's an EXP system, but that's tied to the training mini games, while the actual matches advance you through the rankings and net you money to spend on new equipment and clothes. It's annoying that you don't improve your stats through matches and instead must treadmill your way through the training games – especially given that the games available vary from frustrating and repetitive, to nigh on impossible.

What the current EXP system means is that you don't develop your character the way you want. Instead, you wind up leveling up repeatedly in the mini games you're good at, and missing out or struggling in the ones that you hate (and believe me, you will come to hate some of them) regardless of what style of tennis you play in the matches. That said, at least your stats are increased appropriately in the mini-games. Consistently move around to your forehand, for instance, and you'll get more points for that side and less for backhand.

Even so, the in-match gameplay is as solid as ever, and forces you to learn to position yourself to make good returns. Working your way through the rankings and tournaments is also good fun, and you'll find that the step up to the next level of competition is always challenging. But as entertaining as the gameplay is, it hasn't been refined as you would expect from a new addition to a series. The AI will still make elementary mistakes, losing track of the ball or letting it bounce at their feet without trying to pick it up, while the partner AI often shifts tactics without warning, shadows you for an entire rally or leaves balls that you can't possibly get to. By and large it's a smooth game of tennis, but we were expecting less niggling issues. We were also surprised at just how long it takes to load your custom characters on screen.

The main reason to buy this game then, is for the Wi-Fi multiplayer for up to four players. It really is fun, but ultimately if you have VT2 on PS2, unless you really really want to play Virtua Tennis against friends on the run or during lectures, there aren't that many other selling points. In fact, the only genuinely new content takes the form of the "Ball Games" mini games which are high score challenges accessible via the main menu. And while we're on the subject of the Ball Games, what is it with Sumo Digital and fruit? After the fruit-related hi-jinks of the new play modes in their Outrun 2 port, they've done it again with Virtua Tennis and "Fruit Dash". Guys – enough with the fruit already, but thanks for not bringing maths back into the bonus game equation.

Cam Shea

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

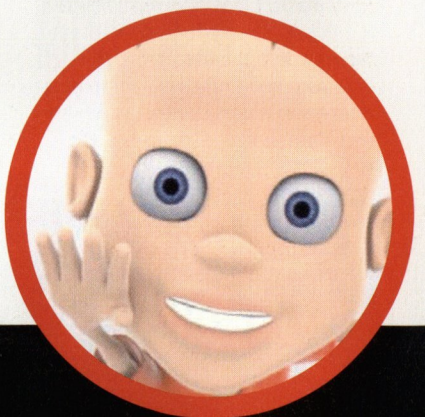
DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Tennis
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Sumo Digital
PUBLISHER: SEGA
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	82	86

OVERALL
83

we play seriously...



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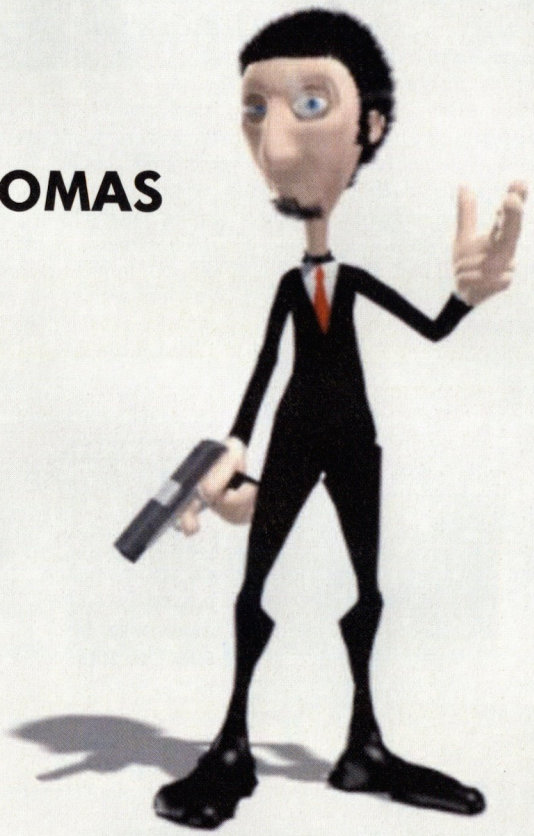

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Darren White

NBA STREET SHOWDOWN

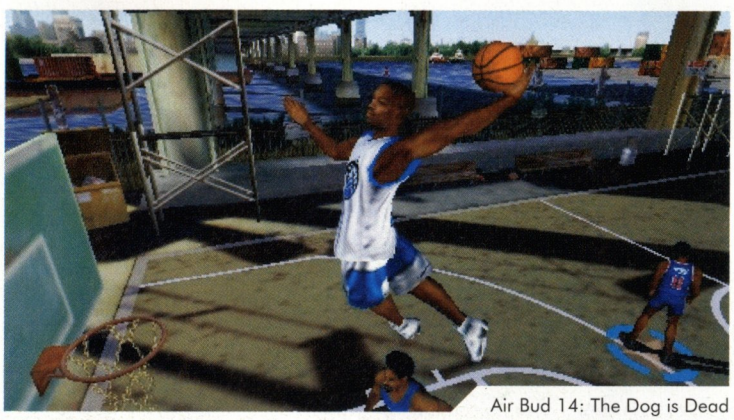
It's surprising what a change of scenery can do for things; NBA Street just seems like a helluva lot more fun on the PSP than on any home console. Not for any substantial gameplay innovations or anything, just that the hello-arcade-goodbye-sim comic-book style nature of the game just better suits a machine that you can pull out of your (over-sized) pocket and play in fits and starts.

Well almost. The only real fault to Showdown is the loss of the right analogue stick (from its PS2/Xbox cuzzes) for all those hip trick moves, making things a wee-bit more challenging with the PSP's less ample array of usable buttons. Given that a big part of what makes NBA Street so enjoyable is the mix of regular points style play and Gamebreaker games (where flashy trick moves are strung together to fill up a supercharged play meter), EA could have done more to reduce the steep learning curve just a tad. As it stands, you'll have to master trick moves pretty much the moment you play a trick-points based game.

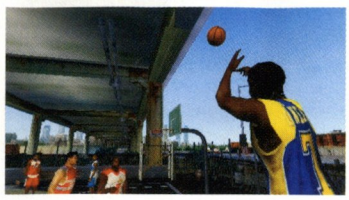
Otherwise, Showdown is a relatively faithful port of the action-cum-RPG goodness that's been hitting the consoles these last few years. The focus on the fundamentals of basketball and the removal of most rules and constraints make this take on basketball highly engaging.

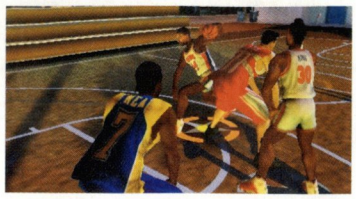
PSP owners also get the bonus of two new mini-games (arcade shootout and shot-blocker), which can be played with friends to boot.

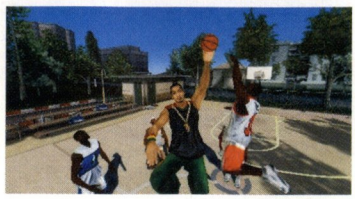
March Stepnik



Air Bud 14: The Dog is Dead







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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Street Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: EA Big
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	80	75

OVERALL
78

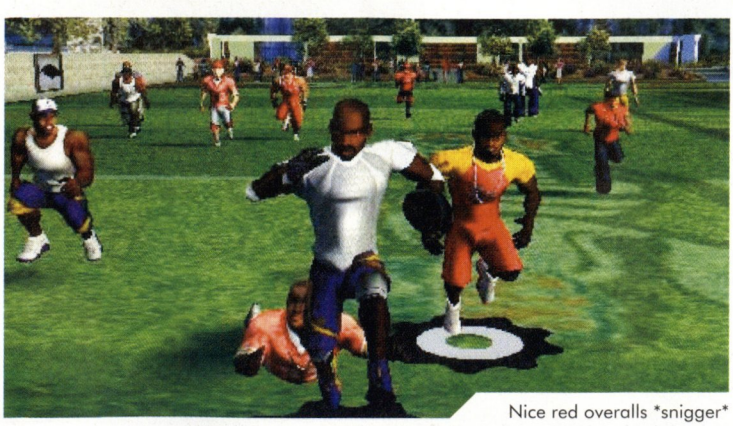
NFL STREET UNLEASHED

Much like its cousin NBA Street Showdown, Unleashed plays a treat on the PSP and offers a similarly fresh, stripped-down arcade take on a massive sports institution. So where NFL American Football has its multitude of penalties, play clocks, officials, play challenges and even players themselves, Unleashed brings the action back down to low-riding pants basics. Most conventions have been done away with; you either pass or run the ball into the end zone with you and a maximum of six other team mates – there isn't even an option to kick a goal for those extra points. Needless to say this makes things a heck of a whole lot less confusing than the real thing.

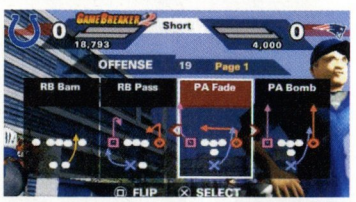
Unleashed is also a much more faithful port of NFL Street 2 than Showdown was of NBA Street, and as a result you've pretty much got every game mode found in the console version for the go. Indeed, Unleashed has surprising depth; the main game mode ("Own the City") is a sizeable challenge in itself, but you've got another substantial mode in NFL Challenge – a massive tourney where you take on the best of the NFL. The RPG-systems found in these modes also serve as a nice counter-point to the other, more basic pick up and play modes found in Unleashed.

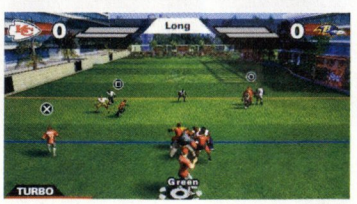
There are three new exclusive game modes for this PSP version but they're mostly pap (although the rhythm dance action in the end zone certainly amused) and aren't enough to convince previous owners of Street 2 to pick this version up (unless you insist on going mobile). Nor do they do anything to disguise this game's biggest flaw. With around sixty-second load times for most game sessions, Unleashed beats even Tiger Woods in painfully long PSP load times. Shudder.

March Stepnik



Nice red overalls *snigger*





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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Street Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: EA Big
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	75	65

OVERALL
70

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UNTOLD LEGENDS

Every gamer craves a good hack and slash outlet. Untold Legends is about as hack and slash as they come, offering an inherent pleasure as you first carve up spiders, then later all manner of weird and wonderful nasties.

The Diablo-style format works well on a handheld, as you can quickly dip in now and then for some dungeon bashing goodness. A simple teleport system for returning to the city and then bouncing back to your dungeon makes vendoring gear and finishing quests an easy process. The complex control options are well conceived, with movement on the analogue control and custom allocation of skills on the D-pad.

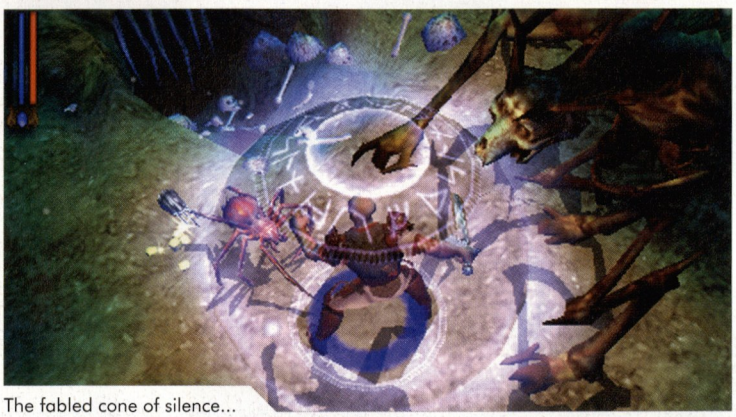
Improving and tweaking is a big part of the joy to be found here. Weapons and armour can be buffed with special runes and totems to add special damage or stat bonuses, depending on the combinations, and characters have ability trees to develop your skills to suit your style of play.

Dungeon layouts are random, offering additional replay value and quest drops are also random. This is where the game encounters some issues, as the random drops are poorly calculated. You can often get hit with an item you already have and the quest NPCs will often reward you with the same piece of equipment for multiple tasks.

On the accomplishment level, the graphics are great, though you encounter contrast issues at times, while the audio is well produced but does get repetitive.

This isn't a game that will draw you in with its originality. This is an entertaining mindless diversion that can have you venting frustrations on unsuspecting monsters for many months to come. With four classes to choose from and a level max of 50, hack and slash devotees will find plenty of gameplay to keep them coming back.

Seamus Byrne



The fabled cone of silence...

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: SOE
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81	73	86

OVERALL
80

MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION

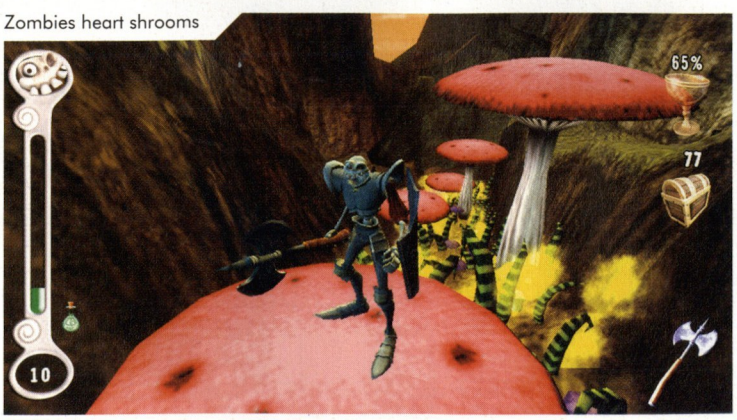
It's hard to keep a good skeleton down. With that in mind, Sir Daniel Fortesque returns to his undead heroism in MediEvil Resurrection and manages to both succeed wildly and fail dismally almost in the same breath. We'll start with the good points. MediEvil is a nice looking game with a solid framerate and some good character and level design. It is also an absolute triumph of voice acting with the wonderful Tom Baker almost reprising his narrator role from Little Britain, introducing levels with brilliantly funny non-sequiturs and introducing the game with such charm that you quickly become sucked into the world.

On the down side, MediEvil doesn't do anything different from the last game to bear the name. It's a fairly average action/adventure by today's standards albeit a funny and charming one. Although many of the levels are decent, Resurrection falls during the boss battles which veer wildly from grotesquely simple pattern following to deliriously and frustratingly difficult precision timing and placement, not an easy task when you consider that the combat engine in the game is on the short bus side of simple and is very item based. If you don't have the right weapon for an encounter you may as well go through the level again.

In support of the single player game, MediEvil features multiplayer mini-games for up to 8 players but by and large they are more uninspired than the game itself. Running around hitting rats has an appeal for about 10 seconds but that's really it. If you do happen to purchase MediEvil Resurrection make sure to do it for one reason and one reason alone. Tom Baker is gold.

Daniel Wilks

Zombies heart shrooms



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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: SCEE Cambridge
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: PG
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	90	67

OVERALL
65

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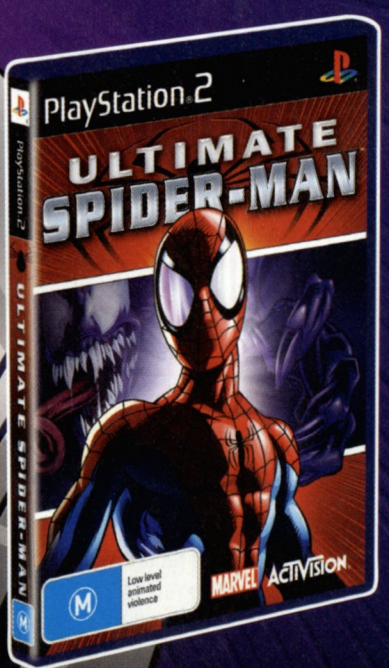
OCTOBER 2005

UltimateSpiderManGame.com



M Low level animated violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2 | XBOX | NINTENDO GAMECUBE | GAME BOY ADVANCE | NINTENDO DS

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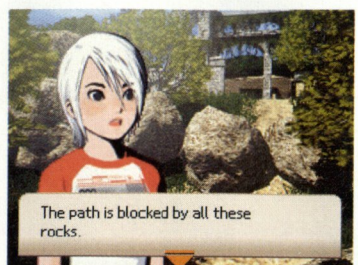
MARVEL



Windswept and interesting

ANOTHER CODE: Two Memories

We've been ranting on at length to anyone who will listen (or stops moving for long enough) for quite a while about how the DS system has so much potential that is being wasted by games that do not take advantage of it. Now there's finally a game that does take advantage of everything (and we mean everything) that the Nintendo handheld has to offer and, in the immortal words of the Bible, "it was good". Another Code: Two Memories (not the best title but we take what we can get) sees players cast in the role of a young girl, Ashley, trapped on the mysterious "Blood Edward Island" searching for the father she has long thought dead. Oh yeah, she also helps a ghost get back its memories. This is adventure gaming simultaneously at its most traditional and most innovative.

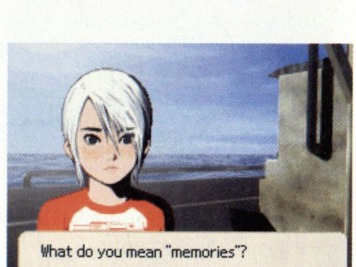
BLOWING CANDLES

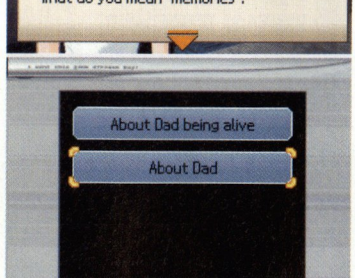
Players guide Ashley around using the touch screen, interacting with objects and people with the styles. This is the most basic utilisation of the potential of the DS. Early on in the game, Ashley comes into possession of a device that looks exactly like a DS that can take photos, play memory cards and the like. The dual screens of the DS allow players to overlap and manipulate images to solve puzzles or obtain clues. The microphone is used to blow out candles or blow away dust. Hell, at one point the fact that you can close the DS is used to solve a puzzle. In short every single thing in the DS is used and it's great. The interface is intuitive and fun – a hands on, tactile approach make many of the puzzles more accessible as you have more room to experiment. Unfortunately the stylus control of Ashley can make for some difficulties as it is easy to overshoot the mark but overall it works very well. The puzzles for the most part are of the very traditional variety – find the key to X door, play the right notes, etcetera, but the hands on approach elevates them into something new. Making a charcoal rubbing on a note pad to find out what was written on the last page torn off if not a new gimmick but having to lightly colour the touch pad with the stylus to uncover the hidden message is.

With the controls being so good, it's a pity then that the story is a little on the twee side, not to mention short – you should have no problem at all finishing it in around 6 or so hours. After finishing the game once apparently some things do change in the game but we can't see there being much in the way of replay value.

Another Code is certainly an attractive game and it sounds quite good too but we aren't able to give as enthusiastic rating as we would like due to the short life of the game we will say that everyone (that means you too) should buy a copy of Another Code. If you do somebody in charge may notice and start green-lighting more games that truly take advantage of everything that the DS has to offer.

Daniel Wilks





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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

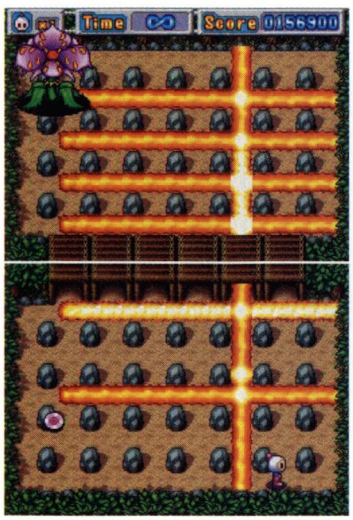
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	81	91

OVERALL
87

BOMBERMAN DS

Bomberman is Bomberman is Bomberman. Throughout the very long life of the series (which has appeared on nearly every console known to man in some form or other) the only real differentiation between Bomberman games has been the powerups available to the player and the number of players able to go head to head in all their explosive glory in the frantically fun multiplayer.

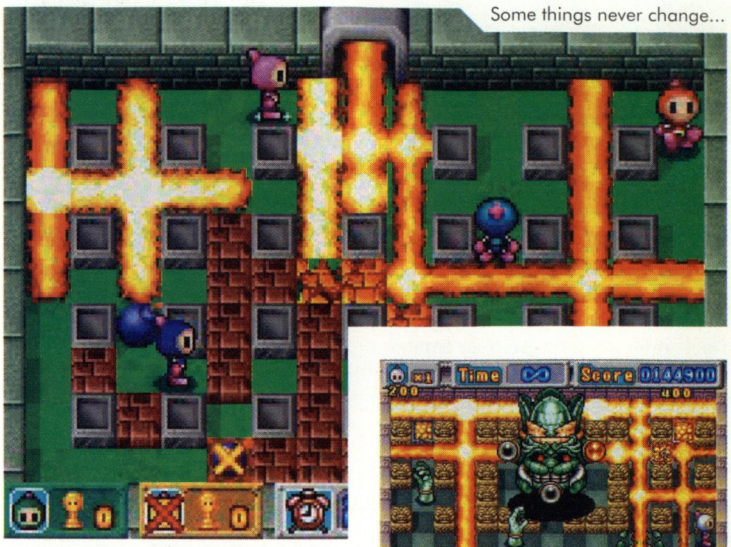
Bomberman on the DS, the latest iteration of the series that seems destined to live until the end of gaming as we know it, plays something like a "best of" of previous Bomberman games, featuring most of the powerups from previous games and excellent eight player multiplayer games. The single player game, essentially a tutorial for the multiplayer sees players racing around a maze planting bombs to destroy walls and enemies whilst picking up powerups enabling them to move faster, plant more bombs, add radius to the explosions and the like. Whilst fun the single player isn't all that rewarding but it certainly does prep you for the real heart and soul of the game, frantic bombing of up to seven other players.



In keeping with the DS hardware, developers Hudson have added a few little twists to take advantage of the touch screen and microphone. The tough screen is utilised for mini games and menu commands and the microphone can be used for voice activating bombs and powerups – not a bad innovation at all but not something you want to try out on the bus home.

Daniel Wilks

Some things never change...



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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Puzzle/Action
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Hudson
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $49.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
74	78	80

OVERALL
80

SPLINTER CELL: Chaos Theory

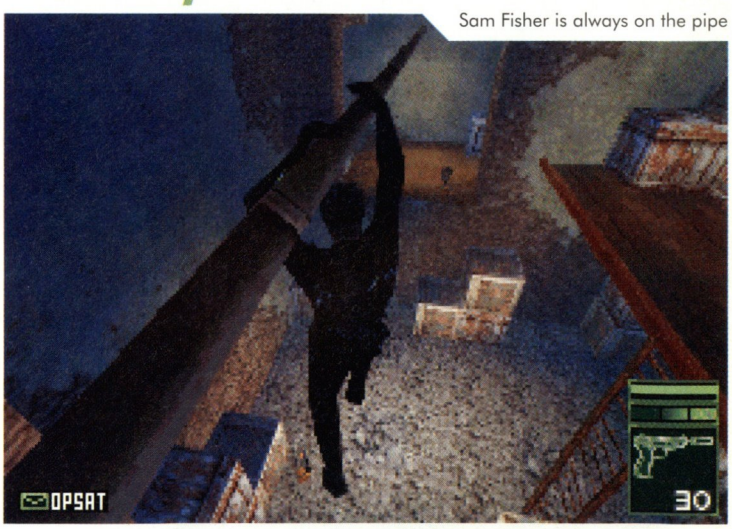
Porting a full 3D Splinter Cell experience to a handheld has always sounded a bit like too risky a proposition to us and if Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory on Nintendo DS is anything to go by we were right to be sceptical. To put it plainly, whilst Splinter Cell does have some definite things going for it, the nature of the DS and the power of the machine just don't seem to be up to the task of actually running the game.

Right from the start players will notice that the game has an appalling frame rate, which is far too erratic to be smoothly playable. The problem of playability is further exacerbated by the controls, which utilise both the D-pad and the touch screen, the former to control Sam Fisher's movement and the latter to control the camera and aim. Whilst using the touch screen to control the camera is all well and good if you're hiding behind an obstacle and can take your sweet time to aim, using it to gun down an enemy who has noticed you is next to impossible so you can expect to see the Mission Failed screen again and again until you get a level perfect. The touch screen camera control also makes it very difficult to turn and run if things go pear shaped.

What's more, the gadgets at Sam's disposal are by and large useless, with the different vision modes standing out as not only being ugly but pointless for the most part. Unless you're a huge Splinter Cell fan you'd be best sticking to console or PC.

Dirk Watch

Sam Fisher is always on the pipe



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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Stealth Action
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: GameLoft
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
60	71	55

OVERALL
55

SPIDER-MAN 2

After the glorious free roaming of the last console Spider-Man 2 it's a little disappointing coming back to a much more linear structure for PSP, but thankfully it works qujte well. And to be honest, we're relieved that this is more than just a port – Vicarious Visions have created a new game structure with new CG cutscenes (where Peter Parker unfortunately looks like he's wearing mascara) and have recorded new dialogue with the actual cast.

Spider-Man 2 follows the basic plot of the film with plenty of other missions along the way. Gameplay largely revolves around busting heads, rescuing civilians and hitting switches. It's a formula that's been done plenty of times before, but thanks to Spidey's great set of abilities, there's usually fun to be found. There's just nothing like (now simplified) web slinging, climbing walls, zipping straight to the ceiling, reveling in the over the top kick and punch combos, snaring enemies in web and using your Spidey sense – if only to hear the amusing narration.

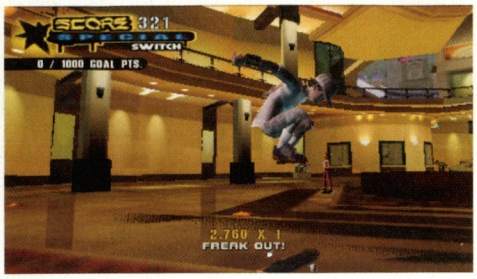
Unfortunately, there are a few things that let Spider-Man 2 down. First up, none of the aforementioned abilities are much fun in corridors or small rooms. Jumping about like a super hero tends to result in the camera going wonky and not showing you what you need to see. Outdoor areas are fine, and the game really should try and stick to them, instead of confining you to the great indoors a lot of the time. Compounding this, the camera control is on the D-pad, with movement on the analogue nub, which means you basically have to stand still to manipulate the camera. And then there's the game's length. You're looking at a few hours to work your way through, and the replay value ain't that good. Even so, not a bad debut for the web slinger on PSP.

Dirk Watch

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 /
DEVELOPER: Vicarious Visions / **PUBLISHER:** Activision /
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** PG / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	79	77	79



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2 REMIX

It's hard not to be impressed by how much content Neversoft (and now Shaba games for the PSP version) managed to jam into Underground 2. Their skating mechanics just keep getting more and more expansive, with the likes of manual, flatland, revert, spine transfers, lip tricks and running into tricks now being joined by sticker slaps, natas spins and focus mode. Almost everything you could want to do on a skateboard is essentially possible now. You can edit all your tricks and specials, you can import your face onto your custom skater via an image on the memory stick, you can create-a-graphic, create-a-goal and create-a-trick. You've got a huge Story mode to work through, encompassing 13 large levels (including Las Vegas, Atlanta, Kyoto and Santa Cruz which are all new to Remix) or if the unstructured levels aren't your thing, you can go back to a two minute time limit and goal structure in Classic mode. There's a massive soundtrack, a host of Wi-Fi multiplayer modes for up to four players and best of all, it runs wonderfully on PSP and aside from restrictive camera controls, plays well too.

So why is it that this isn't a 90% plus game? Because although it may be content rich, Underground 2 Remix's gameplay feels unfocussed in execution. It relies far too heavily on gimmicky/platform style objectives at the expense of actual skating objectives, and the level design is frustratingly convoluted, making the actual act of beating objectives and unlocking content feel like work, as opposed to fun. There are moments of brilliance and the skating mechanics have essentially limitless combo potential, but they're balanced by missed opportunities to reinvent rather than recycle.

Game Cat

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Skating/platform / **PLAYERS:** 1-4
DEVELOPER: Shaba Games / **PUBLISHER:** Activision /
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** PG / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
84	85	85	83

WORLD TOUR SOCCER

Pro Evo fans, turn back now, there's going to be nothing you want to read here. Those who just want to have a bit of fun and score some goals in their soccer game of choice, on the other hand, this review is for you.

World Tour Soccer comes to us from the team behind This Is Football and is quite a pleasant surprise. As you'd expect, it's arcade soccer, pure and simple. The focus of the gameplay is very much on attacking; on weaving through the opposition using shimmies, step overs and spins. The three Ss in other words. The passing game is intuitive and easy to pick up, player control is reasonable, switching strategies on the fly is simple and goals flow like expletives from a grizzled 19th century prospector's mouth. Defense isn't as strong, but much like Pro Evo you can use the L shoulder button to swarm team mates to tackle the player with the ball, and slide and block tackles are very effective and straightforward.

In terms of play options, the meat of the game lies in the Challenge mode and selection of Cups available, and there's plenty of content to unlock. Challenge mode in particular is spot on for this style of game, awarding points for how you play. Stylish football – smooth passing and goals, and well executed tackling net you points, while "unimaginative football and reckless defending" will lose you points. Striving for the Gold medal in each of the games in this mode definitely adds greatly to the game's appeal, although with only seven matches in the mode it's a little short lived. Fingers crossed more matches become available via download.

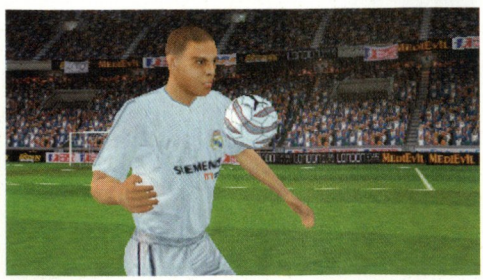
It all looks wonderful on the PSP's small screen too thanks to some strong models and animation, and with Wi-Fi for two player games it all adds up to a well rounded arcade soccer title.

Frank Dry

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Soccer / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: SCEE London / **PUBLISHER:** Sony /
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
81	80	78	80



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WIN FAHRENHEIT!

ATARI

6 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

>> Not only is Fahrenheit one of the highest scoring games this issue, it also marks a triumphant return to the gaming world for the concept of the interactive movie. Fahrenheit sees you playing as three characters – Lucas Kane, a man with blood on his hands, and the two detectives who are assigned to track down the murderer and figure out what's going on. It's a novel approach that's rich in atmosphere, and combines both good old fashioned sleuthing with real-time action, as well as 24 style sequences that alert you to other events taking place. It's well designed and immersive, and as such, deserves to be a part of your game collection.

Thanks to our friends at Atari, we have six Fahrenheit prize packs to give away, each of which contains a copy of the game on PS2, a Fahrenheit T-shirt and an Atari beanie.

To be in the running, just tell us:

>> What are the names of the detectives you play as in Fahrenheit

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

WIN MAGIC THE GATHERING PRIZE PACKS!

10 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

>> Hitting all good toy and hobby stores on October 7 is Magic the Gathering's Ravnica: City of Guilds release. We don't know much about it yet, save for the setting, which sounds something like this: "In the largest metropolis of a city-covered plane, perspectives will clash and laws will be tested. From the depths under the city to its lofty spires above, Ravnica's citizens eke out an existence even as all around them ancient guilds vie for control and power." Sounds cool huh? Well, thanks to our Wizard friends (Wizards of the Coast that is, not the broom riding spell casting variety) we have 10 Magic the Gathering Ravnica: City of Guilds packs to give away, each containing 1 Magic the Gathering Ravnica: City of Guilds Theme Deck and 3 Magic the Gathering Ravnica: City of Guilds Boosters.

To be in the running, just tell us:

>> How many cards are there in a Theme Deck?

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

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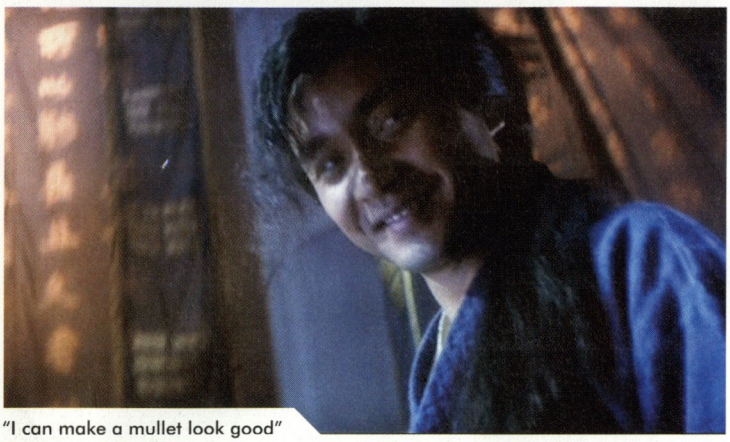


"I can make a mullet look good"

The Bride With White Hair

EASTERN EYE, M 15+

Before Ronny Yu fled HK and started making a series of shitty action films with everyone's favourite has-been, Jean Claude Van-Damme he was thought to be one of the next great honky directors after John Woo, Tsui Hark and Ringo Lam. With films like this on his filmography it's not hard to see why.

A sumptuous romantic swordplay fantasy, *Bride* tells the Romeo and Juliet story of Cho Yi-Hang (Leslie Cheung), a handsome and dashing Wu Tang swordsman and Lien Ni-Chang (Brigitte Lin) an assassin raised by wolves now in the employ of the tyrannical back-to-back Siamese brother and sister twin leaders of the evil Supreme Cult. As stories of star crossed lovers are want to do, tensions between Cho and Lien prove too much and it all ends in blood and tears. Whilst the plot isn't anything new (aside from the brother/sister Siamese twins), Yu's approach to the material is both refreshing and rewarding.

Both of the main characters question their place in the world rather come across as two dimensional caricatures and the passion between the two leads is palpable and erotic rather than tame and chaste as seen in most HK genre efforts.

Above all else, *The Bride with White Hair* is a beautiful film. Peter Pau's cinematography justifiably won him a Hong Kong film award and likewise Eddie Ma's art direction (mostly using artificially lit dark sound stages to give a striking etherealness to the film) equally deserved his. And besides, Brigitte Lin has the most beautiful and expressive eyes on the planet.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 6

"You got a real purty mouth"

Dead and Breakfast

IMAGINE ENTERTAINMENT, MA 15+

Dead and Breakfast is never going to be mistaken for a good film but with any luck it will become an outright cult hit. It deserves to be due to the amount of love and dedication obviously poured into its low-budget making. The plot is nothing new – six remarkably old teens jump in an RV to head to the wedding of a friend and wind up having to stay in a B&B run by none other than David Carradine. Things go pear shaped when he winds up dead, along with his cook (Deitrich Bader of *The Drew Carrey Show* fame doing the worst French Canadian accent ever), evil spirits are released and the town turn into a pack of bloodthirsty ghouls. As is expected, the "teens" have to hole themselves up in the B&B and try to survive the night.

Along the way we get a bunch of Peter Jackson-esque gore, some terrific jokes - a standout being the redneck guitar player who acts as something like a Brechtian scene transition, singing a brief song about what has happened and what will happen next – a ghoul musical number and not one but two Carradines bringing twice the Carradiny goodness.

It's not a good film but it is an enthusiastic and funny film that displays a love of the genre and film in general and doesn't waste a minute of its slim 70 odd minute running time.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: TBA

Feel my silent pain

Bangkok Dangerous

EASTERN EYE, MA 15+

Bangkok Dangerous is a film that revels in style and excess, sometimes to the detriment of character and continuity but never fails to entertain and amaze as a result. Telling the story of Kong, a deaf mute Thai hitman with a heart of gold, *Bangkok Dangerous* drags us kicking and screaming through numerous executions, slowly warming us to the ever silent Kong before dropping the real plot, a spiralling circle of revenge after one of his two friends is brutally raped and Kong falls for a gentle pharmacist named Fon.

The Hong Kong born Pang brothers (The Eye) pull out all the stops with direction and editing, swapping film stocks, using fast and slow motion, razor sharp editing and a frenetic pace to drive the action to its inevitable climax.

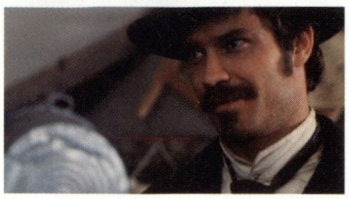
Pawalit Mongkolpisit is the heart and soul of *Bankok Dangerous* as Kong and uses his punkish good looks and subtle physicality to bring his deaf mute character to life, but the real star is the action which is in turns stylish and very brutal. Every action in *Dangerous* has an equal and opposite reaction and the escalating games of revenge drag you in to the last tragic frame. Although still lacking in real budgets, Thailand is fast becoming an excellent source of entertaining movies, filling the void left by a post hand-over Hong Kong.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: TBA

Deadwood

PARAMOUNT, MA 15+



We'll say it again. Thank god for HBO. *Deadwood* is another of their stellar productions and one of the most hard-edged TV shows ever. Set in the American Wild West in 1876 shortly after Custer's last stand, the town of Deadwood is a law unto itself, established on Indian land in the pursuit of gold and thus operating outside the control of the rest of the country.

What *Deadwood* does perfectly is shatter the romance associated with the Wild West. This is life as it would have been – dirty, brutal and often very short, portrayed with no punches pulled. The rawness of this series is quite confronting at times, and all the better for it.

Much of the power in the town lies in the palm of the saloon owner Al Swearengen (and it ain't just a funny name – this guy is a swearing machine), a thoroughly nasty man who pulls the strings behind the scenes, and runs the prostitution and liquor business. At odds with Swearengen is Seth Bullock, a principled man who's still prepared to do what it takes, and in between are the prospectors, whores and lowlifes. It may not sound like cheery viewing, but it's one of the most compelling series' in recent years and almost perfectly cast. A must-see series.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 1

Wild Bill is THE Man

WIN SERENITY!

Ever since the first season of *Firefly* was cut short, fans have been clamoring for more, and *Serenity* is set to deliver. Yes, Joss Whedon has brought his Wild West infused space drama to the big screen, and we can assure you after seeing an early screening, that the result is nothing short of magical. Set 500 years into the future, the crew of the Firefly class freighter Serenity, used to eking out a living on the fringes of the galaxy, now find themselves pursued by both the Universal Alliance and the savage Reavers after picking up a young doctor and his mysterious sister. Taking place six months after the events of the series, and featuring Whedon's trademark blend of compelling characters, action and humour, *Serenity* is a must-see for both fans of *Firefly* and newcomers alike. Thanks to United International Pictures we have ten prize packs to give away. Each contains a double in-season pass to see the film, a poster and a 32MB USB memory stick. *Serenity* opens September 29th, so send in your entries quickly as we'll be drawing the competition on the 27th to ensure winners have their tickets in time!

To be in the running, just tell us:

What is the name of the character played by Nathan Fillion?

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

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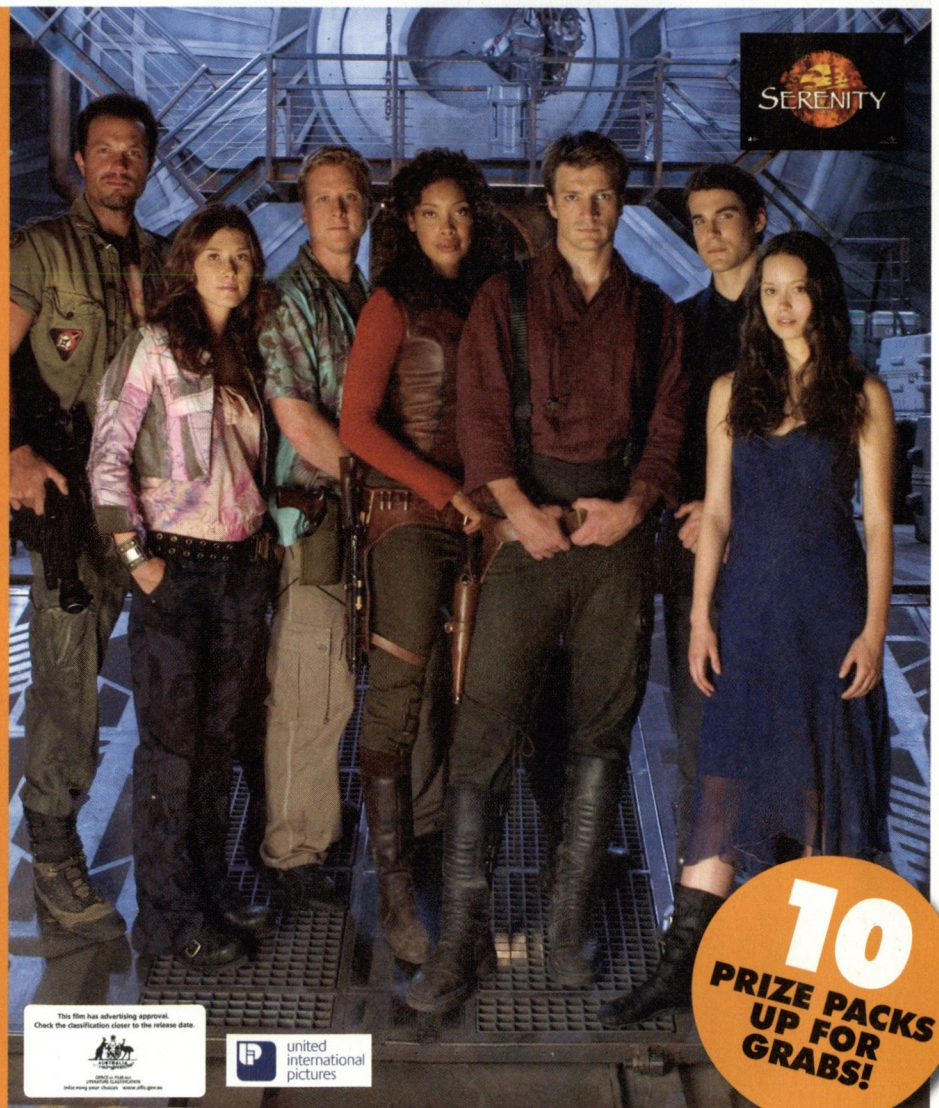

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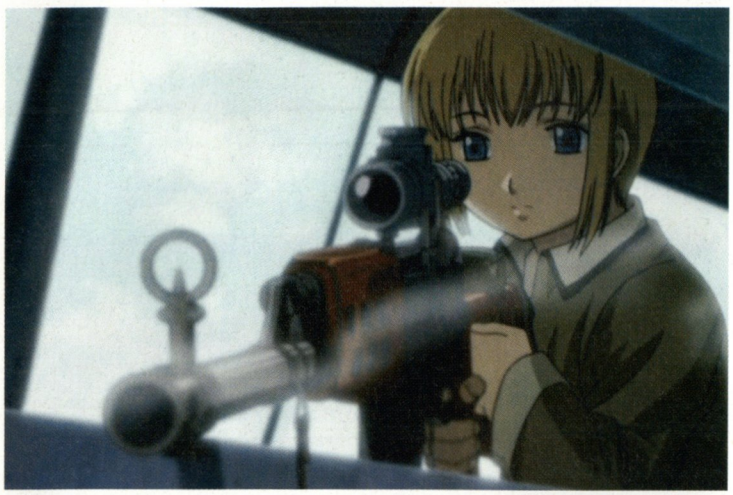

Sexy Girls with...nah, that's just wrong

Gunslinger Girl VOL 1: LITTLE GIRLS, BIG GUNS

GENRE: ACTION/DRAMA
PRODUCTION: MADHOUSE STUDIOS

As far as the public are concerned, the Social Welfare Agency is a government organisation that saves the lives of terminally ill girls. In reality however, the girls are given cybernetic bodies and "conditioned" to remove all memories of their past life, then trained as assassins. The first few episodes of *Gunslinger Girl* focus on one such child – Henrietta.

While being quite violent in places, *Gunslinger Girl* concerns itself more with providing a window into Henrietta's adjustments to her new life and body, and particularly her relationship with her "brother". Each girl, you see, is assigned a man who is responsible for her training, and is ultimately accountable should missions go awry. Each brother has his own approach to being a mentor, and Henrietta's brother Jose is torn between duty to his job and affection for Henrietta which results in guilt over the brutal acts she must perform. He's also of the opinion that less conditioning will make her a better agent, which is sure to result in a showdown with Social Welfare Agency bigwigs later on in the run of 13 episodes.

Although it's not stunningly original, *Gunslinger Girl* becomes quite compelling, and the cruel concept of saving someone's life only to erase their memories and turn them into killing machines has great story potential. Although Henrietta is initially the main character, over the five episodes on the first disc, we also come to know some of the other girls a little better, and come to the realisation that in their strange world of training, killing and learning about the world anew, some have it much better than others.

Gunslinger Girl isn't without its problems, however. The second episode recycles a whole bunch of scenes from the first, the skips in chronology feel a little amateurishly handled at times, and there are moments when it feels like the story has been set to fast forward for no apparent reason. Even so, check it out.

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 7
EXTRAS: 2 /OVERALL: 7

This pic speaks for itself

Burst Angel VOL 1: DEATH'S ANGEL

GENRE: CYBERPUNK/WESTERN
PRODUCTION: GONZO

If you like *Bubblegum Crisis* it's pretty much a given that you will like *Burst Angel* as the two series share a good deal in common, most notably robots on the rampage and a bunch of scantily clad girls with big guns giving them what for. The setting for *Burst Angel* is great – it's some time in the future and a new law has been passed in Tokyo that all citizens can carry sidearms. Naturally the instances of gun violence have risen so the police force forms a new group RAPT (Recent Armed Police of Tokyo), a bunch of gung-ho jarheads with big guns and bigger robots who prefer to utilise extreme prejudice to solve crimes rather than actual police work. They're also riddled with corruption.

Enter the Burst Angels, a quartet of mercenary women lead by Sei, the most diplomatic of the bunch. Meg and Amy provide backup and computer skills and a bit of Lolita fan service. And then there's Jo. After the first four episodes you're still not quite sure who or what Jo is but you do know she kicks a hell of a lot of arse. Jo is the gunfighter, giant mecha pilot and all round badass of the group and the episodes are at their best when they centre around her exploits. Unfortunately the second two episodes on the first disc focus more on Meg, the seemingly most ditsy and useless of the four, although she may come into her own later in the series. The final main character in the show is Kyouhei, a helpless young chef the girls hire to be their personal cook because with all of the fighting they have to do they rarely have time to cook for themselves. He requires a lot of saving.

The plots for the episodes are rather simple but they are carried beautifully by the fantastic character design and amazing 2D/3D animation that has become synonymous with GONZO. The stories don't live up to the standard of the animation as yet but we are still eagerly awaiting the next installment of the series.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 10 / STORY: 6
EXTRAS: 2 /OVERALL: 8

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Xen

The great space opera

When it comes to epic tales with mammoth plot twists, crazy about turns and religious overtones nothing quite comes close to the Xenosaga series. Xenogears, the original game, could arguably be 'the' title that made gamers question just how interactive their medium of choice was becoming. However for a series with so much acclaim, not a single title so far has reached our fair Australian shores although there is always hope for future releases. For those familiar with the series, and those who are scratching their heads until they are bloody and raw, this is the story so far.

Xenogears
- Episode V?

Xenogears was the first title to be released, and was developed way back in 1995 by Square before their joint venture. The game succeeded on a few fronts, namely the gargantuan story and similarly huge mechs (called Gears). With some great hand-to-hand combo moves in and out of the Gears, a nice selection of characters, lovely anime and CG cut scenes and a stellar soundtrack the game won over a lot of people.

The story itself comes across as a huge Evangelion clone with its heavy religious themes, similar scenarios and characters and eerily similar mech designs. However looking back at the game it's hard not to admire the epic scope of its story and how it evolved. It wasn't perfect, but it worked and was a real driving force for the game. The pacing was quite good as well and a good mix of character battles, gear battles and story sections helped keep things relatively fresh.

Xenogears was not without its flaws though. For an RPG there was a fair bit of platforming involved, and when the game consists of 2D sprites in a 3D world there's going to be some issues. It also featured lots and lots of slow scrolling un-skippable dialogue. Another stumbling block for many was the consistency of the second disc. It is as if the development team ran out of time and implemented three dungeons and had the rest boiled down to chitchat plus boss fights only. In fact the rumour goes that Square cracked the whip and forced the game out because it was too long in development. It is even said that the whole 6-episode story was planned out, but they ended up doing episode 5 only and filling in all the required back-story was part of the delay. Regardless of the exact details (which may or may not be as interesting as the legends), something was indeed afoot as the team responsible split off from Square and became Monolith Software.

nosaga®

>> VAUGHAN SMITH

Xenosaga Episode 1: Der Wille Zur Macht
(Will to Power)

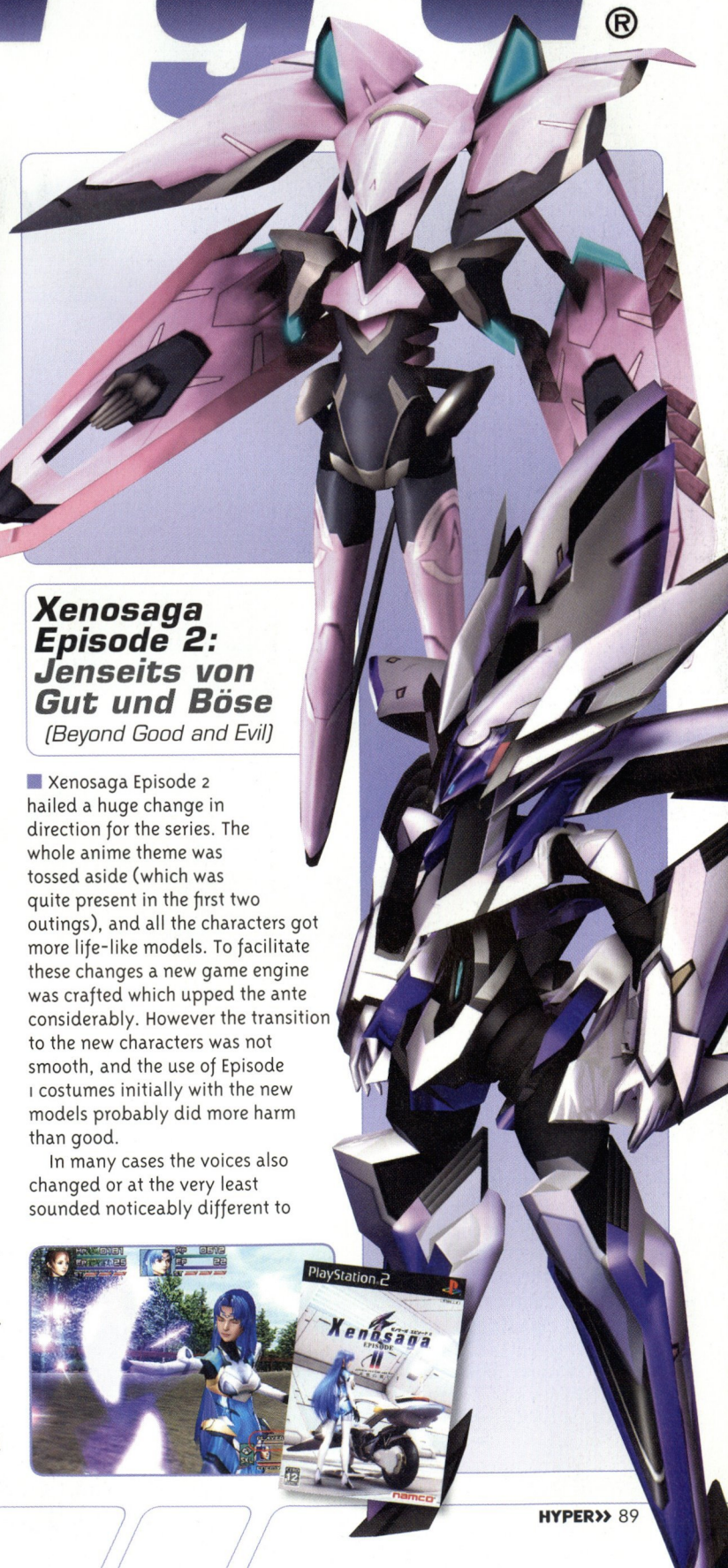
Several years later, along came Xenosaga Episode 1. Unsatisfied by the previous game, Monolith Software wanted to retell the entire story from the beginning. This time it would be exactly how they envisioned it to be, and Namco jumped onboard to publish the title. However it was made clear from the start that Xenogears itself would not be remade, although of course it will exist in some form if they plan on sticking with a similar story. It is interesting to note the game titles are borrowed from books written by Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher of the late 19th century who challenged the basic foundations of traditional morality and Christianity.

Xenogears was very anime inspired and Episode 1 carried on the tradition in fine style. All the characters boasted large eyes, anime styled portraits and used a lot of wings and feathers for their special moves. Funnily enough there are also 40 odd panty shots in the game featuring, you guessed it, the artificial human modelled on a 12 year old girl. There was even a scene involving that very same girl and the major villain 'probing' her that was censored for the US release.

The game itself was well received and with very good reason. Filling up an entire dual layer DVD (that's 9 gigs of data folks) the epic story telling began anew with the invasion of an alien race called the Gnosis, multiple references to Xenogears and some fantastic new graphics that sweetened the deal. Not only was the battle system interesting and stimulating, but the ability to avoid encounters and to revisit previous areas to get all the secrets were fantastic additions.

Of special note was a side quest called the Segment File. Basically there were a number of special doors created all over the known universe and special keys (called decoders) for them were similarly scattered around. Collecting all the decoders required extensive exploration and some backtracking (facilitated so well by the simulation system) and finding them all was both rewarding and fun. Another bonus was the extensive voice acting. The quality of the voice work was actually decent too, and matched the characters very well. Some would say too well, due to a certain incredibly whiny character.

Unfortunately the lip-syncing was way off, and it has been pointed out that not even the Japanese release got this right. The mech presence in this game consisted of A.G.W.S (Anti Gnosis Weapons Systems pronounced 'Aygs') units that were about as useful as a cow in a spacesuit. They were much slower than your characters, and did lower damage. The fact that they were only forced upon you once or twice in the whole game just highlighted how forgettable they really were. However to balance this, Episode 1 included a summonable giant robot that has to be the coolest video-game move ever invented. Think Voltron with even brighter colours and a crazy old lady. All hail the Erde Kaiser!



Xenosaga Episode 2: Jenseits von Gut und Böse
(Beyond Good and Evil)

Xenosaga Episode 2 hailed a huge change in direction for the series. The whole anime theme was tossed aside (which was quite present in the first two outings), and all the characters got more life-like models. To facilitate these changes a new game engine was crafted which upped the ante considerably. However the transition to the new characters was not smooth, and the use of Episode 1 costumes initially with the new models probably did more harm than good.

In many cases the voices also changed or at the very least sounded noticeably different to

the previous game. Imagine your favourite characters being acted out in some twisted cosplay nightmare and you can see how it may have been a little hard to swallow right off the bat.

Another stumbling block was the music. A lot of criticism from the first game revolved around the lack of music. What was there was sublime, but it consisted of many re-used pieces and areas with no music. For the sequel it looked as though Monolith went "Right, we're going to fix those whinging gamers. They will get their music, oh yes they will!" and enlisted a 3 year old playing with a synthesizer to do 80% of the musical score. It is so bad that you couldn't even pin it on the work experience kid. To make a laboured point, the aural onslaught is such a good example of a huge step backwards in musical standards that I honestly expected Axel (our old friend from Streets of Rage) to pop out and yell "BAAARRRE KNUCKLE".

All that said and done, the game was still quite good. The story continued on (once you could re-align with the 'new' characters) and the battle system was evolved to be even better. It was deep, strategic and still kept you on your toes. Whilst not as flashy as the previous game for the most part, the break combos, air juggles, double ethers and double techniques just flow together so seamlessly that it is a real joy to play. The mechs of this game are much more powerful and an integral part of the experience. They look stunning, offset the regular character battles very well and have specially designed areas so you have no real choice. Many of the side quests make a return such as the Segment File and Erde Kaiser, as well as a new "G2 Campaign". It consisted of a series of mini games organised into a quest-based system that kept track of your successes and failures when helping out NPCs. There are also the various "Oh shit that was really cool" moments that help gloss over its shortcomings. Unfortunately the Erde Kaiser in this game is nowhere near as cool as the first one and is another victim of the new non-anime style. Where did the great justice go?

Xenosaga: The Anime

■ It was announced previously that our friends at Monolith didn't want to restrict Xenosaga to just the one medium, and hinted at anime and comics as other ways to progress the story. Well quite recently in Japan the Xenosaga anime has surfaced. Consisting of only a handful of episodes so far, it seems to follow the Episode 1 story very closely. In fact it looks like they have copied the in game cut scenes exactly where possible, only recreated them in 80s style animation. It works, but you can't help but think it needed treatment similar to Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex. There are also random changes needed to skip bits of the story and squeeze it into a 26 episode series and these will irk those who are familiar with the game. It is worth checking out for the anime fans who can't play the game, but to be honest the game is a lot better. Not to mention the game is also interactive.

Future titles
– Will the 'Saga ever end?

■ Episode 3 does not seem to be officially announced yet, but is no doubt in development as the next Nietzsche book title has been registered since the release of Episode 2 in Japan. As Episode 2 received a rather lukewarm reception compared to its predecessors it will be interesting to see if the series will continue right through to its conclusion. On the handheld front Xenosaga DS was announced early on, and definitely holds some promise. However what form the game will take would be anyone's guess, since a direct port of Episode 1 may not work too well, or even be possible.

For those that love a good story this series is definitely worth checking out although it can be quite a time sink. Xenogears and Xenosaga Episode 1 & 2 are readily available brand new (thanks to a re-release of Xenogears) from US online stores and a few Aussie import stores too, so the only real hurdle is a machine capable of playing them. But fear not, since the Anime and DS versions are on the way too. <<

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MAIL HYPER!

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A SENSIBLE FANBOY?

I am also a Fan Boy. (Call to Arms Letter July 05) A Fan Boy of Fun! What an exciting time we now live in.... three or so new consoles on the horizon. So much choice, so many hours of fun to be had. I don't care whether or not my fun is supplied to me via Microsoft, Sony or Nintendo. As long as I get me some fun. I am fortunate enough to own every console for the past 20 years (yes I am old and should of moved on from all this, but just can't), I love them all in a special way. Each and every one has given me hours of fun. The new member of my fun team is the PSP. I bought a Japanese Import and I love it. I have spent hours playing soccer with Fifa, fighting zombies with Untold Legends and speeding my way to the winning post in Wipeout Pure. Amazing graphics and sound. Who would of thought you could have even more fun with the palm of your hands. Everyone must go and get one of these amazing little machines. Just bought a 1gig mem card and now its just like an MP3 player as well. Amazing stuff. So to all those people out there who claim to be fan boys of only this console or that console, please take your blinkers off, there is a huge world of gaming fun to be had out there and it comes from all consoles and companies. I understand that most people may only purchase 1 console and its games, so please don't bag out the other consoles and their owners because you didn't happen to buy that one. If everyone had the privilege to own each console out there they would soon see the benefits of each one. Lets just keep it happy and have fun.

Mick

LETTER OF THE MONTH

UGLY!

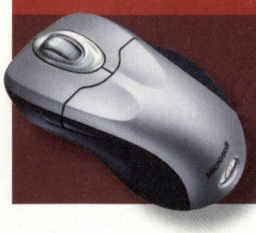
Hey guys,

What the hell is up with the new ratings classifications labels? They're HUGE now and totally ruin the covers of games and DVDs. Do they honestly think we were too stupid to see and understand the nice clean ratings on media before? And now that they're big and colour coded do they really think that it will make parents more responsible for what their child plays and watches? Wouldn't it make more sense to educate the public on the ratings system rather than just make the labels themselves bigger?

And where's our damn R rating for games?

Prime Minister Pete Nice

Word. The OFLC gets the gas face.



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Spot on Mick. We like all of the consoles and do get more than a little irked when the console superiority argument starts. All consoles have their strengths and weaknesses, all consoles have fans, all consoles have nay-sayers who will poo-poo the competition for existing, making money or having a successful business plan.

NINTY HEARTS SONY

Just recently I was reading a history of the Gameboy and I happened to notice something. 1989 - Gameboy is released. 1996 - A smaller GB (GB pocket) is released. 1998 - The GB gets colour. 2001 - The GBC goes widescreen with better graphics. 2003 - GBA with a light is GBA SP. 2005 - Sony comes into the handheld market. GBA gets extra screen, 3D graphics, touch screen, microphone, wireless multiplayer, backlight and stereo sound. Now it might just be me but god am I thankful that Sony released a handheld console. While Sony will someday be the death of Nintendo and I am a strong Ninty fan, I'm pretty sure that the PSP has given the Gameboy a long needed push. Think about it, every few years Nintendo would make the GB slightly more interesting and getting people to dish out another $200 or so but suddenly when the PSP comes along, Ninty make a huge advancement in their handhelds while still keeping the price minimal. I for one am thankful for the PSP, I would never buy one with it's ridiculous battery life and price tag but I have to hand it to them for getting Nintendo to get a move-on with their handhelds. Now for some questions.

1. How much money do you guys make?
2. Do you guys get sent all of your games from the manufacturers?
3. Isn't Fable awesome?
4. When do you think some really cool games for DS are going to come out?
5. What the hell is up with the PS3 controller???

sonic_boi

Good points on Ninty dude. Now on to your questions.
***1.** Whilst we can't go into specifics because of contracts we can safely say, "not enough".*
***2.** We do get a number of games sent to us a month but it depends on release schedules, whether there is timely review code, whether we are interested in covering a game or if it's suitable. We do buy games as well though, especially if it's something that may never see the light of day here, like Katamari.*
***3.** It's pretty good.*
***4.** There are some good games coming out now. Project Rub is great and takes advantage of the system, as does Another Code: Two Memories. Next issue is huge for DS.*
***5.** It's only a prototype – it may go back to the Dual Shock design before release. Fingers crossed.*

ANBARIC BOOGALOO

Hey Cam, just here to say tell you how cool it is that you've made references to the His Dark Materials trilogy. I've spotted two now. One in an editorial about my favourite scene in Northern Lights, the fight between Iorek and Iofur, and the other was in issue 142, Lara Silvertongue. I'd also like to thank you for getting me to buy Tales of Symphonia. That's my favourite game of all time now. I've beat it 6 times and I'm on my 7th.

Kregga

We're all huge fans of His Dark Materials. If you like them, check out Abarat by Clive Barker. The first two books are out now and are amazing.

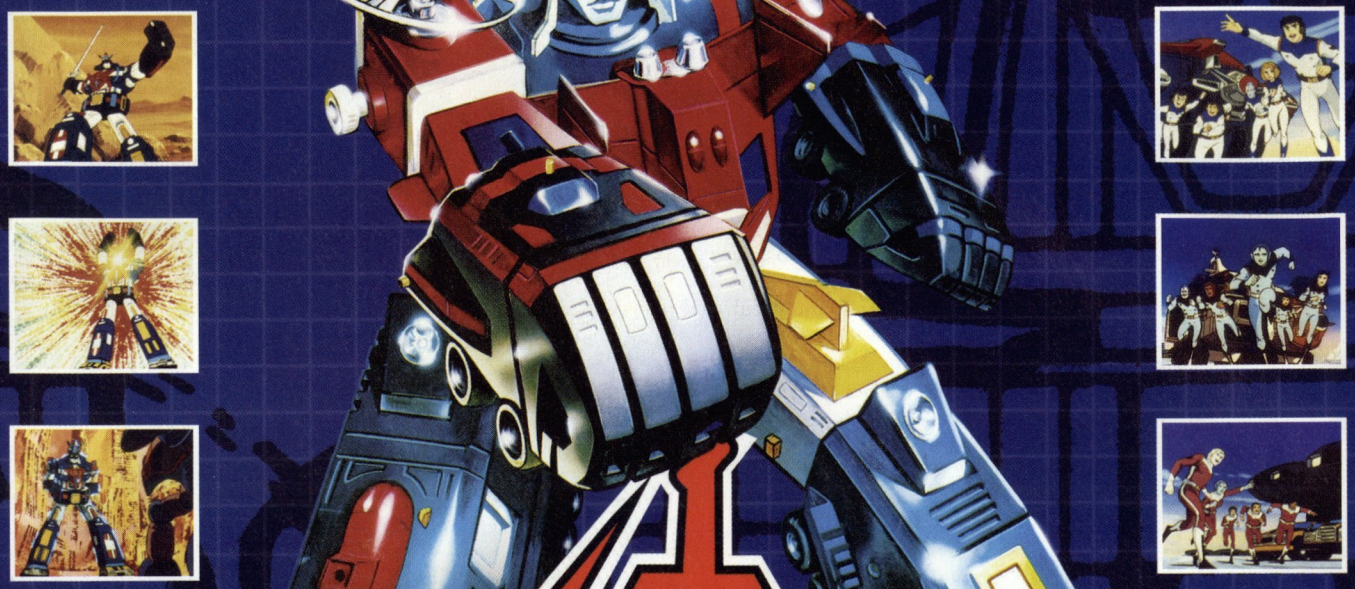
CAPTION THIS!

PART 69 WINNER

Sam Kaye hit the comedy jackpot when he reached deep into his brain and pulled out this scintillating nugget...

Paul Hogan arrives, looking sharp, for the premiere of Strange Bedfellows 2

VEHICLE FORCE VOLTRON
COLLECTION 1



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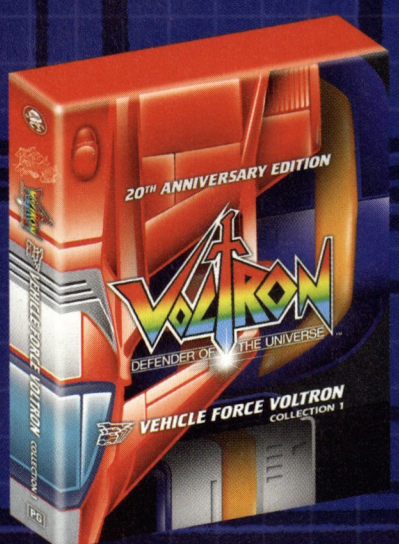

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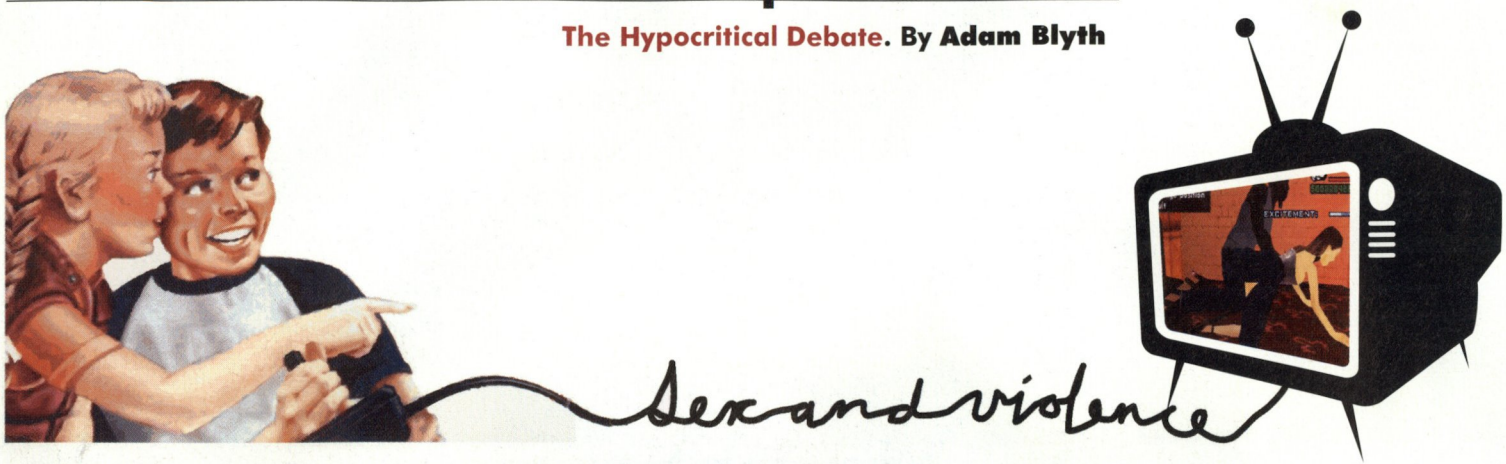
A Reader Speaks Out

The Hypocritical Debate. By Adam Blyth



In recent years I have been overwhelmingly concerned about the anti-videogame lobbyists at home and America, the home of the new gaming era. Particularly concerning is the "evidence" that these people claim is full proof has been shown to be lacking merit at best, at worst being merely conjecture without any true scientific evidence to back up these claims. In a recent American news article these people have described the game industry as "Despite the overwhelming evidence, video-game manufacturers continue to thumb their noses at parents, claiming First Amendment freedoms intended for individuals, not companies." This seems be a ludicrous statement as the First Amendment is there to protect the freedom of all people to express themselves and the games themselves and their stories are usually the product of one or a few people, the rest is still assessed by them as to keep it within their vision. The fact is that it is not a big faceless corporation that creates the game but it is in fact the brainchild of one person, much like a book. If a book talking about the story of a murderers crimes was banned you would have 75% of the nation and 49% of parliament jumping up to protect this very right. Hmm, gotta love that fresh taste of hypocrisy in the morning, I'll take it black with a couple of cubes of kiss my ass.

John Beck, the author of a book about video games, says kids know that video games are just that--games. "I think the kids distinguish pretty clearly between the cartoonish nature of a video game and reality," he told reporters. "I grew up with Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd shooting at each other's heads all the time." Courts have struck down similar laws, saying that videogame content is protected by the First Amendment's free-speech clause. U.S. Court of Appeals judge Richard Posner overturned one such law. In his decision, he wrote, "To shield children right up to the age of 18 from exposure to violent descriptions and images would not only be quixotic, but deforming; it would leave them unequipped to cope with the world as we know it."

These people have also cited gaming as the cause of "Antisocial behavior, a teen who spends hours alone playing a game is crippling himself as he will be unable to interact with others as he progresses in age." However, anyone who plays games themselves knows that the ultimate way to enjoy a game is with a group of friends in multiplayer contradicting the prevailing notion that gaming promotes solitary, antisocial behavior. The Interactive Digital Software Association says there is no conclusive link between videogames and violent behavior. They point out that as videogames increase in popularity, youth violence in the United States declines. What does this indicate, that kids are now able to take out their frustration in a way that is no longer truly harmful to society. Another scientific study has "revealed," and I use the term loosely, that non-aggressive kids show greater aggressive activity when playing a violent game. Why would this be, hmm... is it maybe because the game requires aggression hmm... are they saying that in a game like Halo 2 no aggression is required? If so they should book themselves in for an MRI of their own, because clearly their brain isn't working right either. Many parents and teens argue that no normal kid would be transformed by a video game's violence. They say teens are smart enough to tell the difference between reality and fantasy. Now it is supposedly parents who want these games themselves to be banned because they think it will warp our minds, well it appears my estimate of 75:49 should be changed to 99:49, with the remaining 1 percent of parents being the religious right who would ask for us all to be Jesuits rather then have a life. All this being said it is ultimately up to the parents to impose restrictions on their own children and for the "right" to try and take away that level of responsibility when they are complaining that parents are taking on enough responsibility seems to be pure hypocrisy.

Another point of information is that gaming apparently causes obesity, however according to a survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, computer and videogame players spend more than three times the amount of time exercising or playing sports, volunteering in the community, reading, or engaging in religious, creative, and cultural activities than they do playing videogames. In total, gamers spend 23.4 hours per week on these activities, compared to 6.8 hours per week playing games. Avid gamers -- those who play games 11 or more hours per week -- spend 34.5 hours per week on the activities mentioned above. This completely deflates the argument that gaming is a major cause of obesity, as most of us get off our fat arses and do something.

Another myth being perpetuated by the anti-gaming lobby is that gamers are only boys aged 5-21, again this is rubbish as the same survey showed "Gamers are everywhere and they're everyone. They are your friends, neighbours, co-workers, relatives, and kids, they lead responsible and caring lives, balancing their enjoyment of interactive entertainment with many other activities important to a well-rounded lifestyle," said Douglas Lowenstein, president of the ESA, the trade association representing U.S. computer and video game publishers. "Indeed, those who continue to portray the game population as single-minded loafers are living in their own fantasy world." Equally striking at a time when anti-videogame groups are attempting to blame games for contributing to obesity, the Hart research found that 79 percent of all game players report exercising or playing sports at an average of 20 hours a month.

It would seem that the anti game lobby is running out of arguments at an alarming rate. Even their most basic argument that there must be something bad. "If you look at it closely, the evidence boils down to no more than the fact that children like video games. There seems to be a very common tendency among parents to regard children liking something as prima facie evidence that it is bad for them. If they are spending a lot of time doing something, parents wonder what harm it must be doing them. I think this is fundamentally the wrong attitude. The right attitude is: if children are spending a lot of time doing something, let's try to find ways of letting them do even more of it. Prima facie, the fact that they like doing it is an indication that it is good for them. I think that overwhelmingly the thing which draws people's attention to video games is the fact that children like them. People jump from that solitary piece of evidence to the conclusion that there must be something wrong with video games! As it happens, I believe that playing video games is very good for you but, I think, even more important than understanding why it is good for you, is to understand and avoid the temptation of saying that if you like it, it must be bad for you."

So it would seem that video games are always going to be judged like this until people learn to open their eyes and try it, there is nothing wrong, it is up to the parent to take responsibility, not the government.

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The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Cricket 2005	Sports
2	▲	Tekken 5	Action
3	▼	SingStar Pop Bundle	All Other
4	✪	Star Wars Battlefront	Action
5	▼	Juiced	Racing
6	▲	MOH European Assault	Action
7	◆	Gran Turismo 4	Racing
8	✪	Eyetoy: Play 2 Pack Ptm	Compilation
9	▼	Madagascar	Adventure
10	✪	Lego Star Wars	Adventure

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Super Mario 64	Adventure
2	▲	Spider-Man 2	Adventure
3	▲	Madagascar	Adventure
4	▲	Pokémon Dash	Racing
5	▼	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
6	◆	Rayman	Adventure
7	◆	WarioWare: Touched!	Action
8	▼	Yoshi Touch & Go	Action
9	✪	Bomberman	Action
10	▼	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $50

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Resident Evil 4 CE	Adventure
2	▼	Starfox Assault	Adventure
3	▲	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
4	▲	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
5	▲	Donkey Konga w Drums	All Other
6	◆	Metroid Prime	Adventure
7	▼	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
8	✪	Madagascar	Adventure
9	▼	Mario Power Tennis	Sports
10	✪	MOH European Assault	Action

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Cricket 2005	Sports
2	▲	Halo 2	Action
3	✪	Star Wars Battlefront	Action
4	◆	Juiced	Racing
5	▲	Conker Live & Reloaded	Action
6	✪	Rugby 2005	Sports
7	✪	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG
8	◆	Fantastic Four	Adventure
9	✪	Lego Star Wars	Adventure
10	▼	WWE WrestleMania XXI	Sports

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Battlefield 2	Action
2	▲	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
3	▲	The Sims 2	Strategy
4	▼	The Sims 2: University	Strategy
5	▲	Empire Earth 2	Strategy
6	▲	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
7	✪	Doom 3	Action
8	▼	Half Life 2	Action
9	✪	Rome Total War	Strategy
10	✪	MOH Pacific Assault	Action

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $30

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Pokémon Emerald	RPG
2	▲	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
3	▲	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
4	▼	Madagascar	Adventure
5	▲	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
6	▲	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
7	✪	Legend Of Zelda Minish Cap	RPG
8	▲	Fantastic Four	Adventure
9	▼	Lego Star Wars	Adventure
10	✪	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing

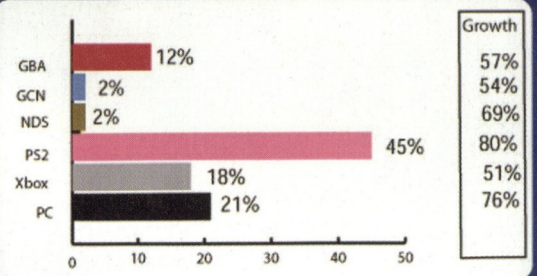
TOP 10 All Full Priced Games

W/E 7th August 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Pokémon Emerald	GBA
2	▲	Cricket 2005	PlayStation 2
3	▲	Tekken 5	PlayStation 2
4	▼	SingStar Pop Bundle	PlayStation 2
5	✪	Star Wars Battlefront	PlayStation 2
6	▲	Cricket 2005	Xbox
7	▲	Battlefield 2	PC/MAC
8	✪	World Of WarCraft	PC/MAC
9	▼	Juiced	PlayStation 2
10	✪	MOH European Assault	PlayStation 2

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

July 05 Vs June 05 RETAIL SALES 2005



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

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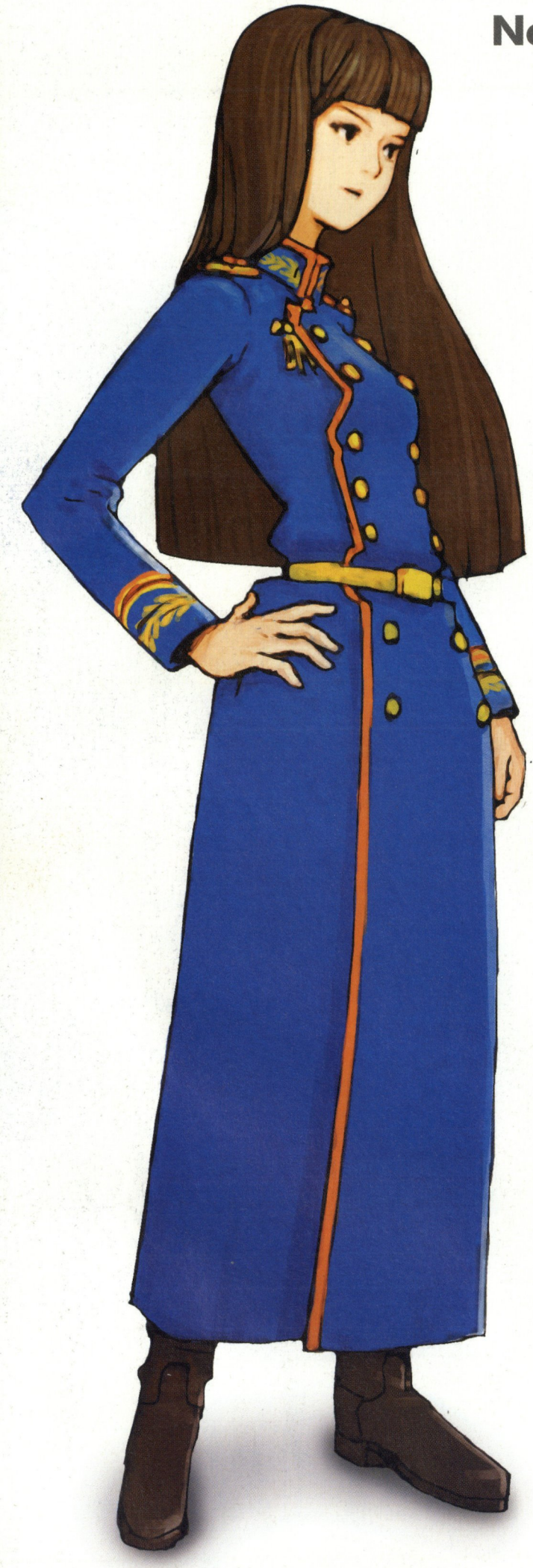

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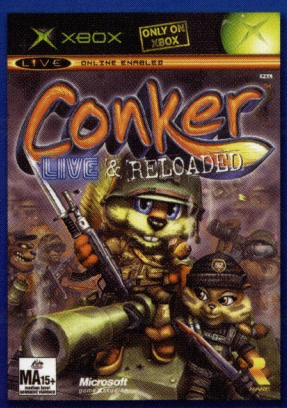

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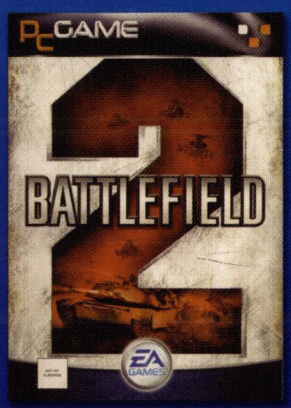

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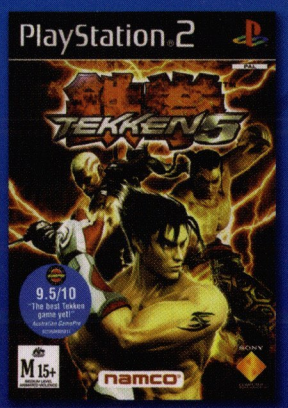

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