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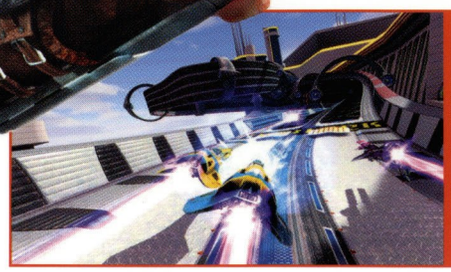
PS3

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

Beauty and the Beast revealed!



WipeOut HD

The futuristic racing classic comes to the PS3

Midnight Club LA

Cars and bikes face off on the mean streets of Los Angeles

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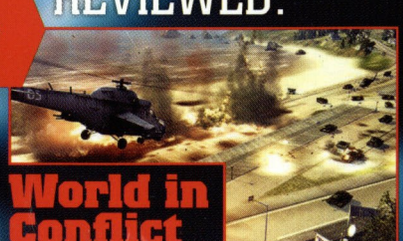
Hands on at the Leipzig Game Convention!

» REVIEWED:



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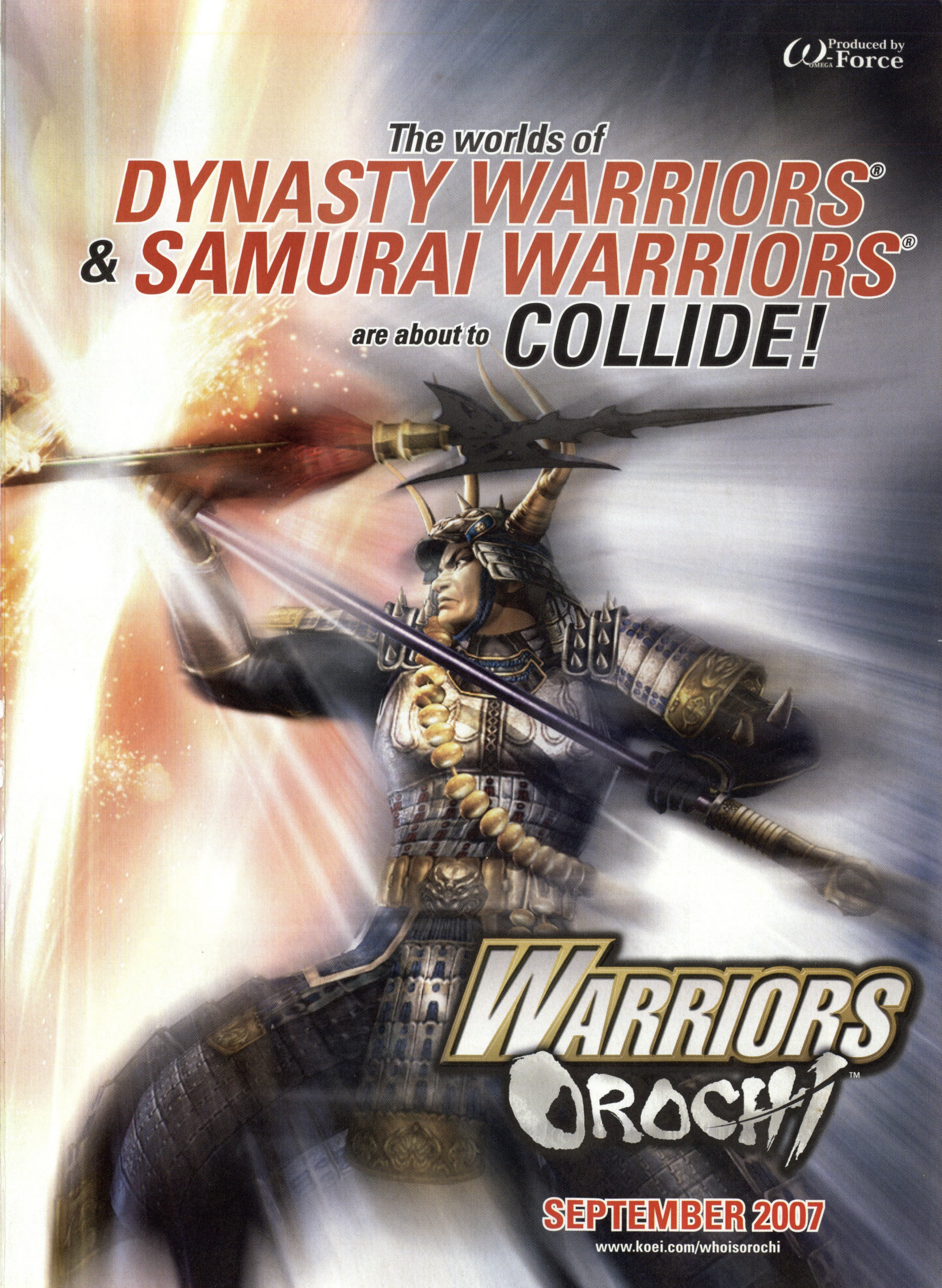
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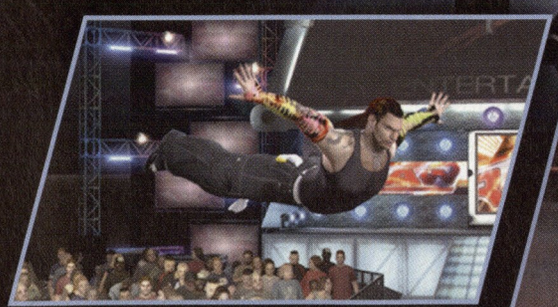

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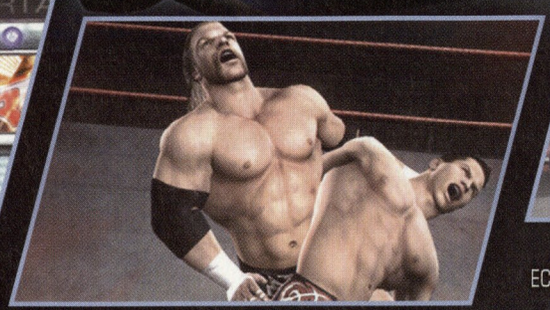

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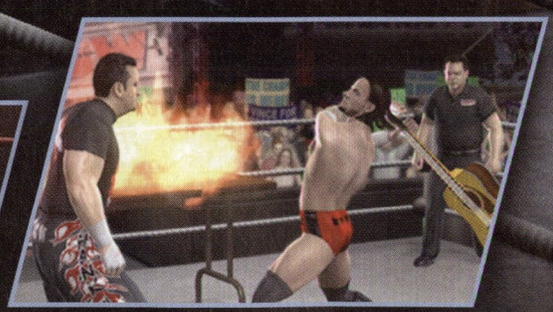

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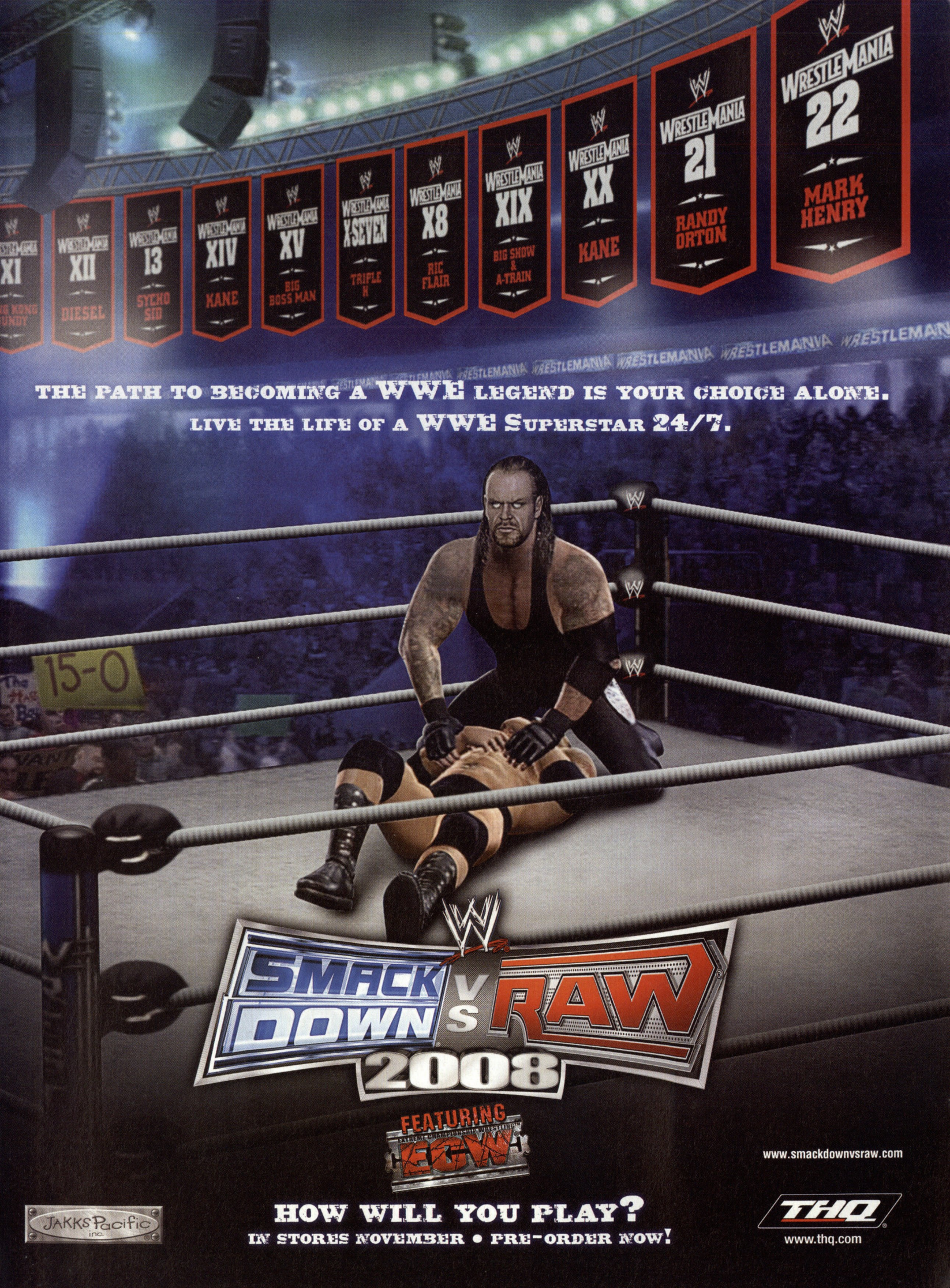
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WRESTLEMANIA XII
DIESEL
WRESTLEMANIA 13
SYCHO SID
WRESTLEMANIA XIV
KANE
WRESTLEMANIA XV
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WRESTLEMANIA X-SEVEN
TRIPLE H
WRESTLEMANIA X8
RIC FLAIR
WRESTLEMANIA XIX
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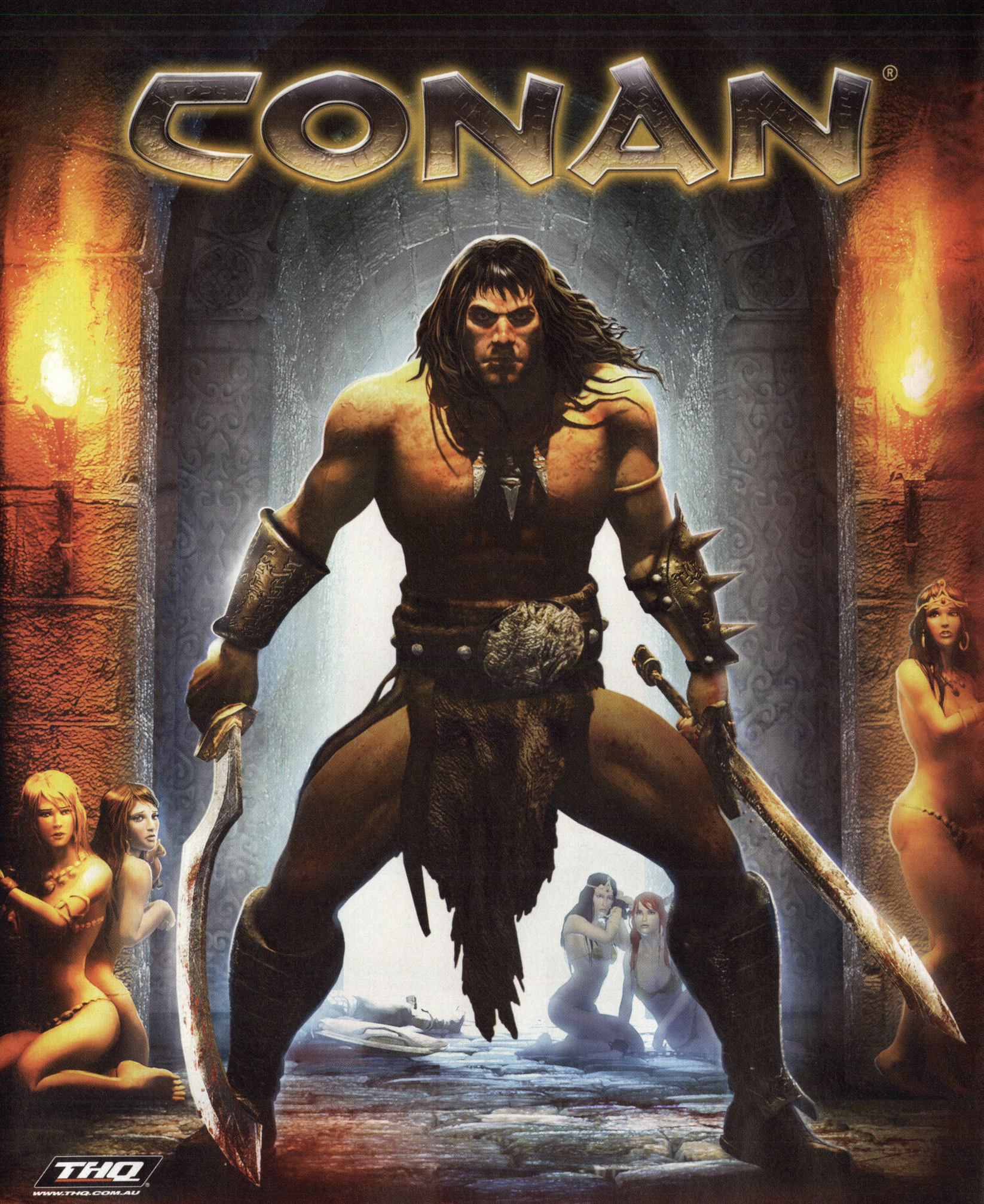

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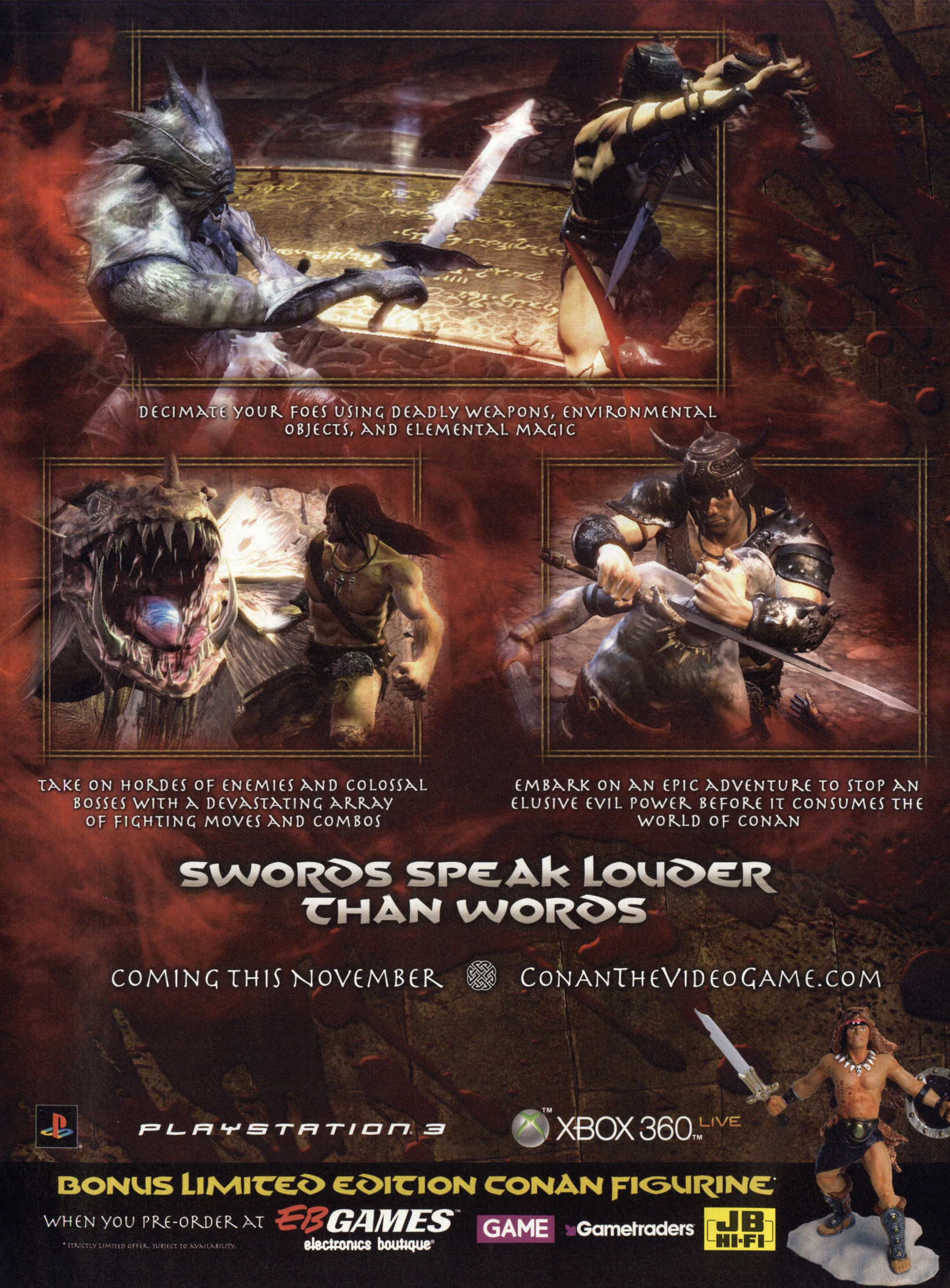
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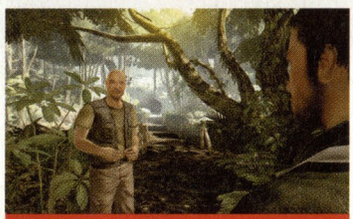

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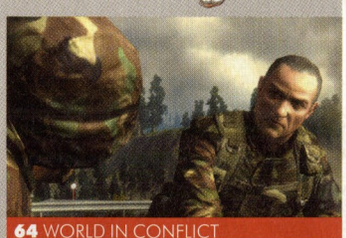

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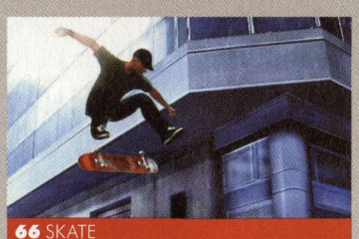

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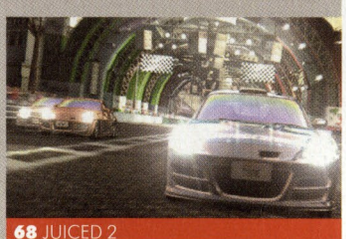

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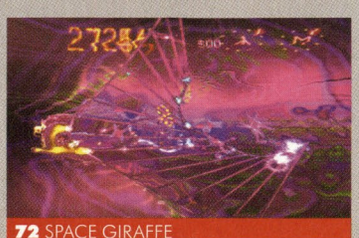

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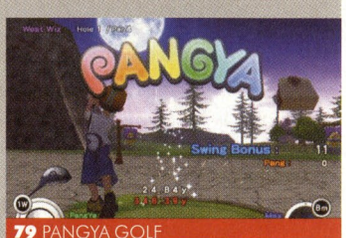

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Leipzig Preview Special

Germany isn't all about beer - we head to the Leipzig Game Convention to check out what's on show at what the industry is calling "the new E3"

Editorial

>>So Halo 3 is finally upon us, a game so caught up in the Hype machine that it even has a teaser advertising an upcoming teaser ad. Sometimes we – and by we I'm using it in a very general sense to include all gaming publications – are accused, and rightfully so, of being a little too liberal with praise in reference to upcoming, big name games. We – and in this case I mean Hyper – try to keep this in line but sometimes there's spillage. At any rate what I'm getting at is that the hype machine, whilst one of the most powerful tools in the inventory of any marketing team, can also be one of the most damaging forces when it comes to game sales. Take, for instance, Heavenly Sword last issue. There was a game that was hyped by Sony, the Media and the Sony faithful as one of the games that would be a killer app for the PS3. It wasn't. It was a beautiful if shallow, repetitive and short action game. Despite the game's failings it has fared pretty well. Lair, on the other hand, hasn't, receiving a resounding drubbing in nearly all forms of games press. Once again the game was tipped to be a true must have for the PS3, the great scaly hope if you will. It has to be asked if the rather scathing criticism the game received was due more to the game being bad – there are many reviews that claim that numerous levels are well designed and the basic mechanics are decent – or the fact that it had been built up so far that the disappointment was crushing to all and sundry? I'm a firm believer that critics usually know what they're doing so the criticism is probably founded (we have yet to play more than the first few – and fun – levels) but still, critics are, for want of a better word, human. Well, at least they're fairly good human approximations.

So, what does this have to do with Halo 3? Does it live up to the phenomenal, almost surreal level of hype? Will our disappointment crush our souls? Read on and find out.

Daniel Wilks >>**Editor**

Hyper Crew

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **Skate** – *Xbox 360*
   "360 nollie varial heelflip baby"
2. **Space Giraffe** – *Xbox 360*
3. **Drawn to Life** – *DS*
4. **Eternal Sonata** – *Xbox 360*
5. **Guitar Hero 2** – *Xbox 360*

MOE – Deputy Editor

1. **Bioshock** – *Xbox 360*
   "If only I had a real Insect Swarm plasmid..."
2. **Skate** – *Xbox 360*
3. **Space Giraffe** – *Xbox 360*
4. **Custom Robo: Arena** – *DS*
5. **Juiced 2: HIN** – *Xbox 360*

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **Skate** – *Xbox 360*
   "Objectives? Pah! Too busy skating."
2. **Animal Crossing** – *DS*
3. **Devil Kings** – *PS2*
4. **Everybody's Tennis** – *PS2*
5. **Final Fantasy XII** – *PS2*

ELIOT FISH – Lord Seafood

1. **Halo 3** – *Xbox 360*
   "It's not easy being green"
2. **World in Conflict** – *PC*
3. **Super Paper Mario** – *Wii*
4. **Final Fantasy Tactics** – *PSP*
5. **Scrabulous** – *Facebook*

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SALES!

Wii Are The Champions!

Wii Surpasses Lifetime Sales of Xbox 360

A year ago many would have balked at the thought of Nintendo once again being on top of the gaming hardware market, beating out then market leader Sony and second-placer Microsoft. However, less than one year after the Wii's November, 2006, international launch (the Australian launch wasn't until December, 2006) Nintendo's white wonder has surpassed the lifetime worldwide sales of the Xbox 360 to become the most prolific next generation console, despite being on the market half as long as its closest rival, and after enduring near-constant hardware supply shortages since launch.

This month the Wii is reported to have tipped the scales with the console's worldwide sales clocking up to approximately 10.57 million units, beating out the Xbox 360's sales of 10.53 million units, while the PlayStation 3 runs a distant third place, with lifetime sales reported to stand at approximately 4.50 million. Nothing to sneeze at, assuredly, but Sony certainly has some ground to cover.

These developments leave Nintendo in a unique position that is has not found itself in since the SNES era. The company now has a commanding lead in both the handheld gaming market, as well as the greater market share in the home console sector.

Now, if only there were some more games to play on the Wii...

ONE!

Game 1 Convention Coming

Games, Cars and Girls, Oh My!

It's that time of year again – the time to look forward to the Game 1/AutoSalon conventions in both Sydney and Melbourne. The dates have been set so it's time to get your tickets. The Melbourne leg of the convention will take place on November 10th and 11th at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Southbank. The Sydney venue, the Sydney Showground at Olympic Park will host the event over the 1st and 2nd of December. Tickets cost $23 but will allow entrants to enjoy both the Game 1 Convention and the AutoSalon event running simultaneously.

Currently only a few of the events at the convention have been announced but we do know that Game 1 will feature the biggest gaming competition in the country, running for a staggering 36 non-stop hours over a number of platforms and gaming titles. We've also been assured that there will be numerous competitions and prizes to be given out and won over the two days.

We hear that Game 1 went off pretty well last year

DADDY!

Bioshock hits Number-One Worldwide

But is quickly overtaken by Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

This month has been an amazing month for BioShock creators 2K Boston/Australia (formerly Irrational Games). Not only did the Xbox 360 version of the game debut at number one on the local Australian game sales chart, with the PC version following closely behind with a debut in the fourth slot, similar success stories occurred the world over, with the game topping sales charts worldwide within its first week on sale.

BioShock's tenure at the top was, in the USA at least, a brief stay, with the latest in Nintendo's intergalactic bounty-hunting simulators, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, overtaking it in its first week on sale.

American gamers nabbed more than 400,000 copies of the game within the first week, and although the game is yet to be launched in other parts of the world, we have a feeling it will be greeted with a similar reception for its local release.

CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at *captionthis@next.com.au* with **Caption This Part 95** in the subject line.

Caption it!

STEAL!

Halo 3 Pirates Banned

Microsoft bans Xbox Live users until the year 9999

It's almost guaranteed to happen sometime before the release of any highly anticipated game, the leaking of pre-release code into the hands of unscrupulous software pirates. Halo 3 is no different, with a version of the game, code-named "Halo 3 Epsilon" reportedly hitting the pirate scene earlier this month. This time, however, it seems that the game's developer, Bungie, have had the last laugh, easily identifying and justly punishing each of the pirates.

The code in question was a practically complete version of Halo 3, which was presumably used for testing purposes at Bungie. However, Bungie had implemented a fairly obvious security measure, in that the code required the player to log onto Xbox Live to begin playing.

Surprisingly enough the hapless software pirates didn't hesitate to log onto their Xbox Live accounts before playing the game, clearly identifying themselves as playing illegal code. The next time they tried to log onto Xbox Live, they were greeted with a nasty surprise, their consoles and their Gamertags had all been banned from Xbox Live until the year 9999. That's right, they've got 7992 years left until they can log back in, so unless they're some kind of ungodly immortal monster, like Michael Jackson, they're not getting anywhere near Xbox Live or their hefty Gamerscores ever again.

According to some reports, a Microsoft employee, who wanted to give the game to her young son, leaked the pre-release code. However, it appears that the youngster couldn't keep the game to himself, with the code soon making it into the hands of a variety of gamers willing to flout the law just to get an early glimpse of one of this year's hottest games. We really have to wonder whether she had a job on Monday morning. We doubt it.

'SCLUSIVE!

Haze Becomes PS3 Exclusive

Xbox 360 and PC versions now "not confirmed"

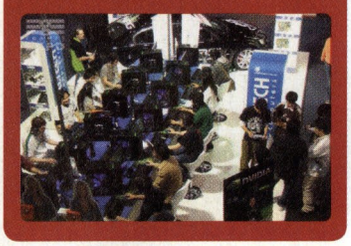
Sony have been on the receiving end of plenty of flack in recent months over the lack of third-party exclusives for the PlayStation 3, but it looks like Sony are taking definite measures to make sure that their line-up of PS3-exclusive titles will be in good shape for the foreseeable future.

A great example of this is Free Radical's (the creators of the TimeSplitters series) latest first-person shooter, Haze, which Ubisoft have just this month confirmed as a PS3 exclusive. While initially expected to be a multi-platform release (and indeed, early game announcements listed both PC and Xbox 360 versions) Ubisoft have since announced that all other versions of the game are thus far "not confirmed".

While we wouldn't rule out the possibility of the game appearing on other platforms later down the track, the game will definitely be exclusive to the PS3 for an unspecified period of time, something that will do quite a lot to bolster the PS3's game library.

E GAMES & ENTERTAINMENT EXPO: November 16th-18th

The Melbourne Exhibition Centre will play host to the eGames & Entertainment Expo between the 16th and 18th of November. During the expo, punters will get a chance to see Crysis, take part in numerous competitions and check out the latest and greatest games on the PS3, Wii and Xbox 360. People interested in getting into the field of game development should take note; the eGames Expo will feature a series of lectures and seminars about what goes on in games design and how to get into the industry. Ticket prices are $16 for adults and $13 for kids. Families can get in for $38. A two day pass is also available for $22.



DISCS!

Paramount And Dreamworks Choose HD-DVD

Michael Bay's Transformers to be HD-DVD exclusive

This month there was a surprising new development in the ongoing war between Toshiba's HD-DVD and Sony's Blu-Ray disc formats, with two previously multi-format movie studios, Paramount Pictures and DreamWorks Pictures, opting for the HD-DVD format exclusively for a period of at least 18 months.

The decision will mean that all releases from studios including Paramount Pictures, Paramount Vantage, DreamWorks Pictures and Animation as well as movies from MTV Films and Nickelodeon Movies will appear only on HD-DVD. This means that blockbusters such as Michael Bay's Transformers will be a HD-DVD exclusive, something that could potentially have a big impact on the format war.

The only exception that Paramount and DreamWorks are making is that the films of Steven Spielberg are not part of the bargain, which will instead appear on any damn format he feels like. It's must be nice to have power.

Toshiba's HD-DVD consortium apparently convinced Paramount and DreamWorks to stop their Blu-Ray support by offering them a variety of financial incentives, which are rumoured to amount to no less than $150 million. Additionally, while the studios could potentially sell a larger number movies on the more popular Blu-Ray format, it seems that the greater profit margins provided by the cheaper to manufacture HD-DVD were another deciding factor in switching to HD-DVD exclusively.

Bay's tanty was not as cool as this

Prior to Paramount and Dreamworks' switch many industry analysts were predicting an easy win for Sony's Blu-Ray, which has so far established a convincing lead on Toshiba's rival format. Now, however, some are contesting that HD-DVD is very much back in the game. By the time those robots in disguise transform into a HD-DVD, we'll hopefully have a clearer picture of where the format war is headed.

DECKARD!

Blade Runner: The Final Cut, Finally!

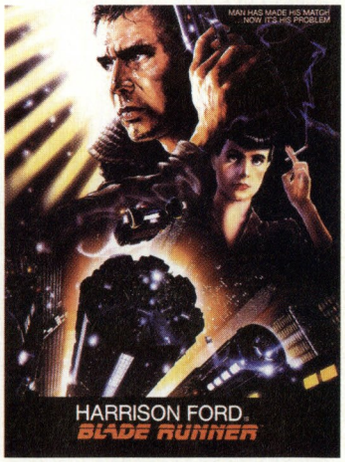
Ridley Scott's masterwork gets the five-disc treatment

While technically not videogame news (who says our news sections has to only be about games anyway?), one of the most exciting news stories this month was that one of our all-time favourite films, Ridely Scott's1982 tech-noir masterpiece, Blade Runner, will finally be getting a DVD release it deserves.

Blade Runner is one of the most influential films of all time, not just on the cinema, but on videogames as well. Until now, however, we've had to put up with nothing but a barebones disc of the 1992 Directors Cut re-release, with a pretty poor transfer and not a single special feature in sight.

Come December it will be a very different story, since Blade Runner is soon to receive one of the most extravagant DVD releases we've ever seen. Coming packed in a metal briefcase, that is a replica of the one used by Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) in the film, Blade Runner: Ultimate Collector's Edition will include four older versions of the film (Original Theatrical Release, the 1982 International release, a heretofore unreleased work print and the Directors Cut), a band-new edit of the movie, with additional scenes, called the "Final Cut" and a ridiculously awesome amount of special features.

There will also be a variety of additional collectibles, including origami unicorn and "spinner" hovercar statuettes, as well as a lenticular-motion image from the film, photo cards and even a hand-signed letter from Ridley Scott himself.



More Blade Runner love than you can handle

The set will be available on standard DVD, as well as both Blu-Ray and HD-DVD, and the local price will be $189.95, although if you're import-savvy you'll be able to pick it up from the USA for a lot less than half that, and avoid those obnoxious OFLC stickers while you're at it.

OVERFLOW

This month Microsoft added a new member to their Xbox family, with the Xbox 360 Elite launching locally on August 30th. The console is a bit pricey at $729.95, but for that price you get an Xbox that runs cooler and more reliably, a HDMI output, and a 120GB hard drive. The black finish on the console and control pad isn't bad either, although admittedly, we prefer the white.

Activision just can't help themselves can they? Another month goes by, and yet another Guitar Hero III boss character has emerged from the woodwork. This time the hero in question is Rage Against The Machine/ Audioslave guitarist Tom Morello, who was quoted by Rolling Stone on the topic of his inclusion in the game; "Whenever I play Guitar Hero my opponent always kicks my ass on my own riffs... Now that I'm actually in the game I hope the digital me will win once in a while!"

You may have heard the rumours about a new PlayStation 3 starter pack, that instead of including launch titles Resistance: Fall of Man and Motorstorm, comes packed with the brand-spanking new Heavenly Sword and F1: Championship Edition, along with the usual 60GB hard drive and two SixAxis controllers. The rumour is true, although unfortunately, you won't be getting one, since the PS3 Heavenly Sword starter kit will be offered in France only. Probably for the best really, since Resistance is much better than Heavenly Sword.

If you loved the Xbox 360's free-roaming super cop sim (and Halo 3 beta ticket), Crackdown, as much as we did, then you'd probably interested in seeing more of Pacific City in Crackdown 2. Well, keep wishing, because developer Realtime Worlds have said "no" to Crackdown 2, at least for the near future.

BEYOND REVENGE
LIES REDEMPTION
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Metal Gear

X360 **PS3** Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **Stealth/Action** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Kojima Productions** • Due: **Early 2008**

Waiting for Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots is a strange feeling. On the one hand, we can't wait to once again get back into our sneaking suits and get down to some tactical espionage action with one of the all-time greatest gaming protagonists, Solid Snake. It's been almost two years since Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, and playing a new instalment in the series considered one of the most intensely cinematic gaming experiences ever, would be an inevitable joy.

On the other hand, the series' creator and director, Hideo Kojima, has confirmed that not only will Guns of the Patriots be that last game in the Metal Gear Solid series, but that after he completes work on the fourth Solid game he will walk away from the franchise forever.

We don't want to see Snake's run come to an end without an appropriate send off, but thankfully, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots is looking like it will be the gaming equivalent of a twenty-one (patriot) gun salute.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

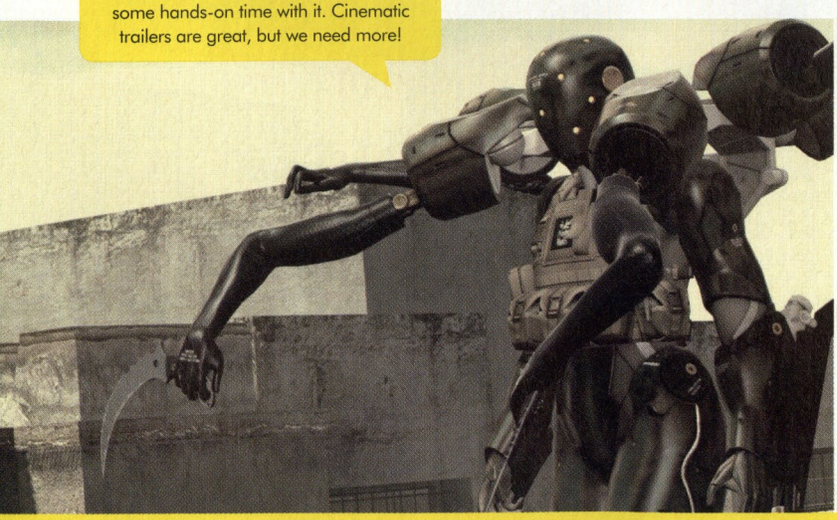
Apart from Kojima getting his rumble back, we'd just love to see some actual real gameplay from MGS4, or better yet, some hands-on time with it. Cinematic trailers are great, but we need more!

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

At the 2007 Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany, Kojima Productions and Hideo Kojima himself put a lot emphasis on the "Beauty and the Beast" theme which is said to run throughout the game's entire narrative. No, Solid Snake won't find himself romanced by a hideously malformed creature who only needs his true love to break a witches spell and reveal its true beauty... or maybe he will, the truth is that we can't say for certain what is going to happen in the thick of MGS4's story, because nobody knows that for sure but Hideo Kojima himself. What we can tell you is that the "Beauty and the Beast Unit" are among the main antagonists in the story of Guns of the Patriots.

The B&B unit are a stylistic departure for Kojima and the Metal Gear Series, as he mentioned jokingly in his main-stage presentation, saying that they seemed like something more from games like Gears of War or Halo rather than an MGS game. Despite looking quite monstrous and very alien, Kojima was quick to point out that these four vaguely female creatures, with their flailing tentacles, whipping tails and flapping wings were definitely "not monsters or aliens" instead revealing that they are actually "humans transformed by battle". Conflict, explained Kojima, has taken four innocent women and transformed them into the ultimate casualty of war. They were once beautiful, but war has turned them into beasts that know nothing else other than more violence.

Kojima feels that this new theme is a good fit for the typically anti-war, anti-nuclear Metal Gear series, and as the games broader story unfolds, he'll no doubt weave this theme into the action and narrative of the game in ways that are both poignant and topical, in true Hideo Kojima style. He has however added one more twist to these intriguing characters, by announcing that for the "beauty" side of each villain he



Raging Raven's first attempts at flight involved a towel tied around his neck like a cape

Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

has recruited four real women to be scanned into the game to give them a true realistic beauty. The models include actresses Scarlett Chorvat, Yumi Kikuchi, and models Lyndall Jarvis and Mieko Rye, and although they may not be immediately recognisable super-starlets, each are very easy on the eyes indeed. Exactly what Hideo Kojima has in store for them, however, is still somewhat of a mystery.

One thing that we do know for sure is you will definitely be coming up against the B&B unit in combat – Kojima did tell us that they were "bosses" after all – and from what we've seen so far, these girls may just be Snakes most bizarre adversaries yet.

EMOTIONAL ANIMALS

The Beauty and the Beast Unit might look unfamiliar to fans of Kojima's previous works, but their names may ring a bell. Each of the four women have taken a two-word codename made up of the name of an animal, as well as what we can only assume is their dominant emotional state. Interestingly enough, each of the animal names have been used before in a Kojima game – as the codenames of the rogue Fox Hound unit that Snake came up against on Shadow Moses Island – Wolf, Raven, Octopus and Mantis.

Crying Wolf was the first beauty/beast unveiled at Leipzig, as she is seen attacking a military convoy. She walks on all fours and even has a flailing tail, just like her canine namesake. In the footage shown at the Leipzig GC we saw her run up walls, lift up a massive tank and bowl over countless enemy troops with a particularly forceful charging head-butt. All the while, you can hear her weeping and sobbing from within her robotic suit. Obviously not the happiest of the bunch.

Laughing Octopus, on the other hand, at least sounds like she's having fun. She lives up to both her names, as not only does she look like Doctor Octopus from Spider-Man, but she also has the habit of uncontrollable laughter. Instead of having four robotic arms extending from her waist, hers protrude from the back of her head, although they do essentially work the same way as Peter Parker's portly nemesis' – flailing wildly, grabbing, crushing, skewering and throwing enemies, all while simultaneously protecting their host.

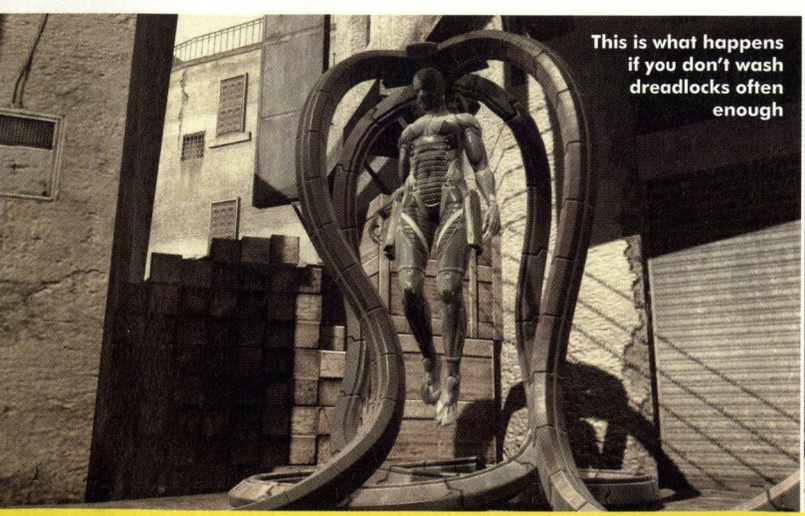
Screaming Mantis is the third beauty Kojima revealed at Leipzig, and as dedicated MGS fans will probably be able to guess, she's a psychic. She has what appears to be six extra limbs writhing out from her shoulders, while she

THE RUMBLE GUY

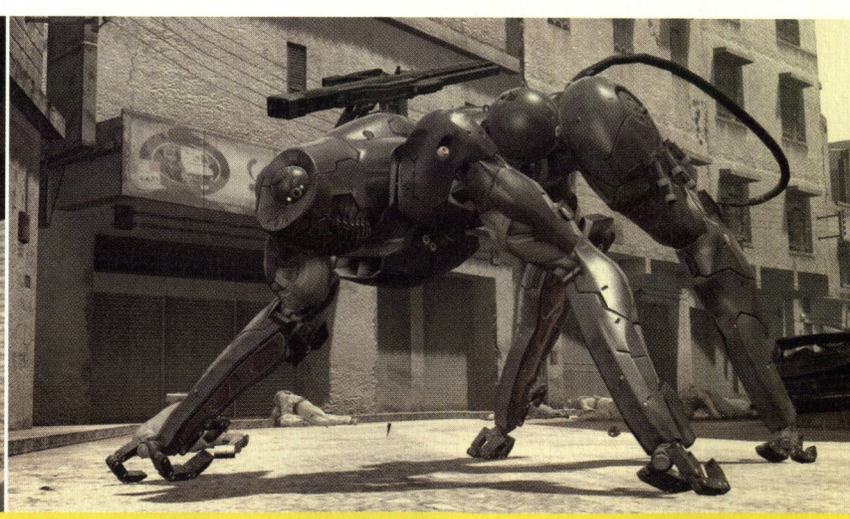
When asked if Metal Gear Solid 4 would perhaps include vibration feedback to work with the rumoured re-redesign of Sony's SixAxis controller – Hideo Kojima responded with a tough-in-cheek answer:

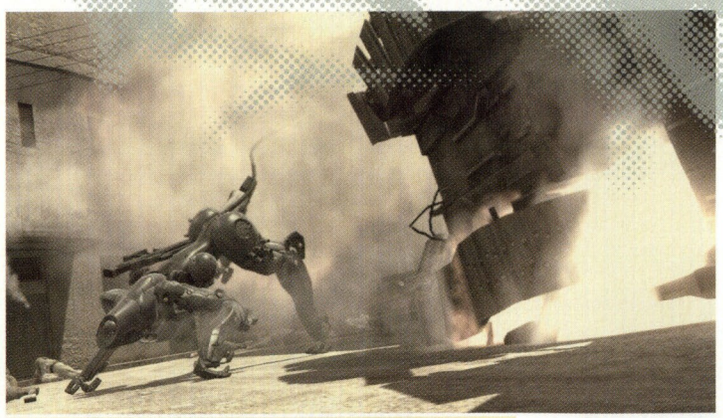
"Let me tell you what I'm thinking every day – at Kojima Productions there is a specialist in creating rumble features, we call him "the rumble guy". Right now he has nothing to do, and I'm really, really worried about what I should have him work on. So I really hope that I can make use of rumble in the game."

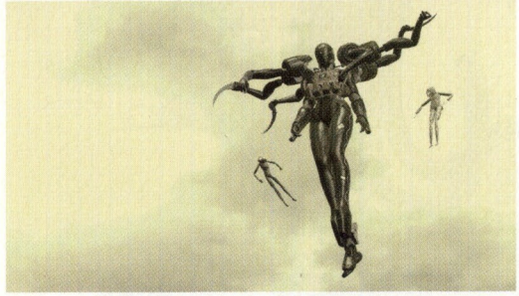
Here's hoping the rumble guy can keep his job!



This is what happens if you don't wash dreadlocks often enough







Crying Wolf and Screaming Mantis - we want Recalcitrant Manatee and Obstinate Lungfish

also has two marionette puppets dangling from her fingertips, which in another interesting reference just so happen to be miniature replicas of both Psycho Mantis and The Sorrow from MGS1 and MGS3 respectively. Screaming Mantis certainly seems to have the power of both of these characters, and is able to possess people, use telekinesis, as well as a few other tricks. Finding out what her links to Psycho Mantis and The Sorrow are will no doubt be one of MGS4's most interesting moments.

Finally there's Raging Raven, who makes good on her avian moniker by actually being able to fly. Her obviously robotic wings flap like a raven's and as she swoops down on the battlefield she lets loose a barrage of guided missiles, destroying anything in her path and bringing down a avalanche of rubble onto any hapless soldiers, including Snake, who happen to get in the way. Oh, and she's angry – really angry. So much so that the extent of her vocabulary is almost entirely restricted to repeatedly screaming the word "RAGE!" at the top of her lungs.

UNDYING RUMOURS

Some rumours never die, and that's what's happening with the rumour that Kojima Productions are also working on an Xbox 360 port of Metal Gear Solid 4, to be release some time after the PS3 version. It wouldn't be the first time the series has made it onto an Xbox console, but Kojima and Co. were adamant that they are "not presently working" on any other version of the game.

Oddly enough, the straight-faced response didn't convince the gallery of press and industry types, who broke into a laugh at the announcement. Somehow, we just don't think anyone's going to let this rumour die until it comes true...

» The B&B unit are a stylistic departure for Kojima and the Metal Gear Series

METAL GEAR PUNTING

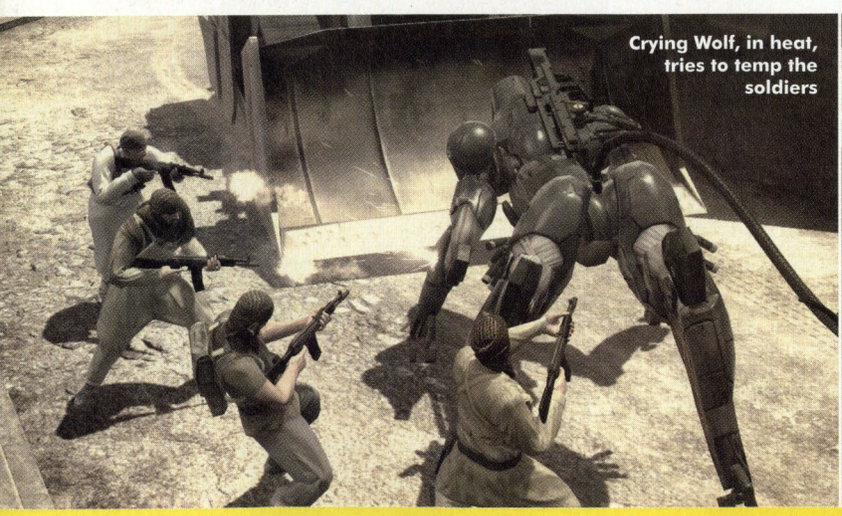
Apart from revealing the Beauty and the Beast Unit, Kojima had one last surprise to unveil – a brand new trailer, produced especially for the Leipzig Games Convention.

Surprisingly enough, the new trailer didn't include even a glimpse of Solid Snake, and instead focused on a battle (or should that be slaughter) between some Middle Easter military types and no less that four Metal Gears. The new Metal Gear design is a bit of a mish-mash between the Body of Metal Gear Rex from MGS1, and some long, athletic-looking biomechanical legs.

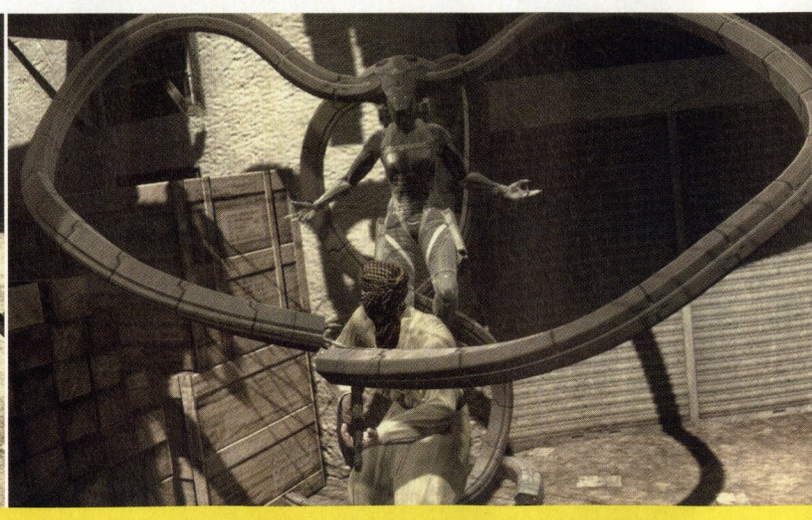
We'd always suspected that these things were going to be quick, and the new trailer confirmed that beyond all doubt. The gang of Metal Gears run at full pelt, surrounding the obviously shit-scared soldiers with ease, before tearing apart their defences, one man at a time.

Just a few of the most memorable moments in the trailer are seeing these new Metal Gears use their legs as weapons – kicking the crap out of, jumping on top of and generally destroying everything in sight. One Gear is seen delivering a spectacular sliding kick to a truck, sending it rolling over onto its roof, while another drop-punts a soldier into next week and another still is seen aquatinting one other soldier with the concrete, by landing on top of him from a great height. Make no mistake, when we eventually have to take Snake up against these bad boys, it's going to get ugly.

Hideo Kojima would make a few other passing comments (see box-outs), but with the Beauty and the Beast Unit and a new trailer out in the open, Metal Gear Solid 4 was definitely one of the highlight games from the 2007 Leipzig Games Convention. With the final game in the Metal Gear Solid quadrilogy now expected to release in the first quarter of 2008, the wait for Snake finale isn't going to be pretty. <<



Crying Wolf, in heat, tries to temp the soldiers



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Midnight Club L.A.

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

Category: **Racing** • Players: **1+** • Developer: **Rockstar San Diego** • Due: **2008**

When it comes to racing games, the Midnight Club franchise is often overlooked, being passed up in favour of some of the more aggressively marketed, higher profile franchises on the market, such as Need for Speed. More is the pity; Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition was one of the best racers in the last generation, with exceptional looks, fantastic handling and a focus on speed rather than tweaking. Did the focus on advertising the game as a racer rather than a box with some large breasts on the front hurt the sales? Who knows? Anyway, why are we talking about Dub Edition? Well, simply put, after seeing Midnight Club LA in action we're stoked and hope that this time around Rockstar will be putting some of their sizeable marketing power to pushing the game into the limelight. Simply put, it looks amazing.

Although the code we saw was only in the very early stages, Midnight Club LA already looks fantastic, thanks to the fact that it is being built using the RAGE (Rockstar Advanced Game Engine) engine, the same engine being used to power the upcoming GTA IV. The fact that the game is being developed by Rockstar San Diego, the team responsible for developing the engine no doubt has a hand in this as well – after all, who better to utilize an engine than the people who built it in the first place? New graphics engines non-withstanding, how does all of this new visual might effect the game? Well, for a start, each of the vehicles will be made up of around 100,000 polygons, making for some incredibly detailed rides, both inside and out. The level of detail in LA is also outstanding. Whilst not a full recreation of the city, anyone who has been to LA will easily be able to recognize streets, landmarks and architecture.

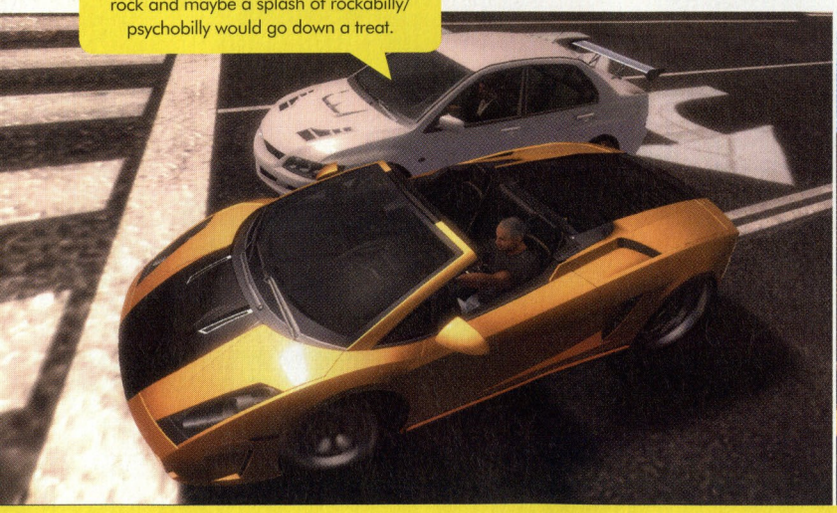
NOBODY WALKS IN LA

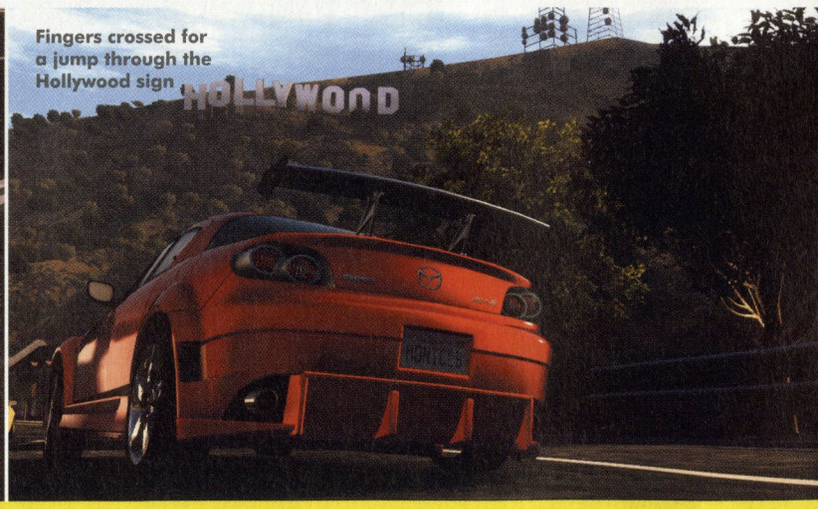
The scale of the game has also changed dramatically since Dub Edition. LA is roughly the size of all three of the areas in Midnight Club 3 combined and the world is seamless. Driving around the world players should experience zero load times, the only loading coming when players jump into a race. The manner in which players can jump into a race has changed drastically as well, depending on how they wish to approach the game. If the player wants to play Midnight Club LA as more of an open world driving game, they can enter races by driving up to any of the opponents shown on the mini-map and flash their lights, triggering a race. If you're more interested in simply jumping into the action, players can also simply zoom out to the city map (the camera simply pulls back to show the entire city in a very impressive show of scale) and choose to jump straight into an event from there.

Midnight Club LA will also feature new camera angles and views, including an incredibly detailed cockpit view. Although the cockpit view looked spectacular, we were more impressed with the dynamic camera that changed position depending on what was being done to the car at the time. Simple straight driving sat in a fairly

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The list of artists licensed for the soundtrack. Some kick-arse racing tunes, a little old school hip-hop, some classic rock and maybe a splash of rockabilly/psychobilly would go down a treat.





normal third person perspective but power-sliding saw the camera drop lower and shift to the side of the car opposite the slide – power-slide left and the camera drops to car level on the left hand side of the car. The effect is very immersive without cutting off the field of view. We can't wait to get our hands on some code to see what else the camera can do.

VROOM

The different classes of vehicles available in Midnight Club 3 will be making a return, so players will be able to choose between an as yet undefined number of luxury, sport and muscle cars, as well as motorbikes. Car tuning will also play a role in the game but as yet none of the tuning options have been detailed but considering that we've been told that the focus of the game will be on going fast rather than modding we're assuming that it will be kept fairly simple and accessible. There is also no word as yet as to whether the aftermarket parts will be licensed or generic.

There is one thing about the game that does have us a little worried it must be said. Midnight Club LA features damage modelling but as it currently stands, the damage modelling is cosmetic only, so crashes won't have any real effect on the performance of the cars. While this is all well and good - there is definitely something to be said about being able to bomb around a track without having to worry about blowing your car to hell if you flub a corner – we do worry a bit about having to pay to repair the damage after a race.

THE FUZZ. **Police will play some kind of a role in Midnight Club LA but so far there are no real indication as to what this role might be. We're keeping our fingers crossed that the police will only be a feature in the open-world map, pulling over drivers for speeding or driving dangerously. We're hoping that they won't show up in races – going fast should be our only concern whilst racing, not obeying the rules and avoiding the boys in blue.**

From what we understand, paying for damage will be as simple as driving into a service station (there are many scattered around LA) and choosing to repair the car but unless the cost of repairs is balanced very carefully with the amount players can win in races it could lead to the horrible position of players being unable to repair their cars. It's still very early stages as yet though so our fears are most probably unfounded.

Even at this early stage of development it's pretty obvious that Rockstar have something pretty special on their hands. Midnight Club LA is shaping up to be one hell of a racing game, combining speed, good looks and scale to create a very impressive whole. Fingers crossed that it will get the attention it deserves upon release. Fingers equally as crossed that Rockstar doesn't find it necessary to license the image of some peripherally associated, surgically enhanced woman to make it as easier sell to the masses.

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Assassin's

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **Action** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** • Due: **November**

The term "intuitive" gets bandied around a good deal when it comes to game controls, with everything new control scheme being either praised or condemned for the player's ability to pick up and play the game instantly, as though that is the only yardstick for intuition – an instant knowledge rather than a fast learning curve. From our hands on time with Assassin's Creed at the Leipzig Game Convention we can tell you that the controls of the game aren't immediately intuitive. They take a while to get used to and a fair amount of experimentation to master. That's not to say they're bad – they're not. The controls are brilliant. It's just that they are different, in both in game terminology and setup.

Each of the buttons on the face of the controller controls a different part of Altair's body. The Y button controls his head, the X his weapon arm, B his free arm and A his lower body. Sounds simple, but each of these buttons can be modified by what you are doing at the time, if you are holding down more than one button and by holding the right trigger down. The right trigger modifies all actions from being Low Profile – the kind of actions that don't arouse undue suspicion from guards – and High Profile – the kind of action that...well...you get the idea.

THE DOWN LOW

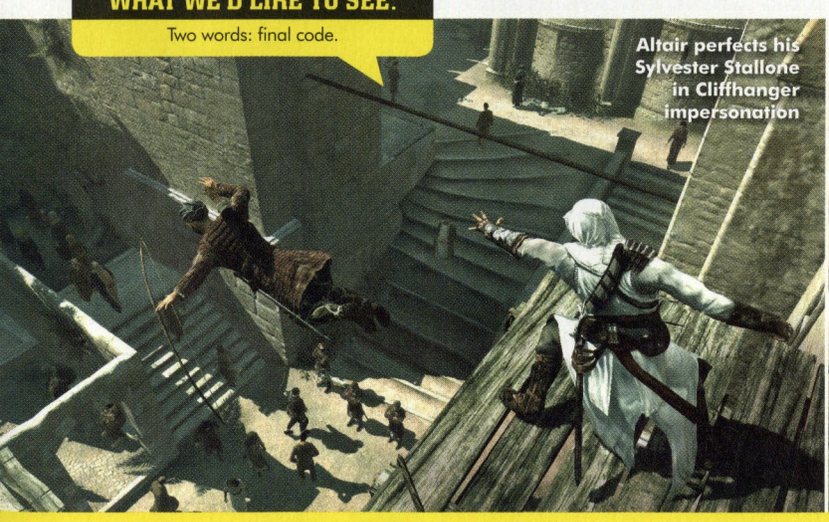
Low Profile abilities are fairly commonplace movements, such as walking slowly and blending into the crowd or using Altair's free hand to gently push people out of the way without hurting them. Of course there's no real low profile way to swing around a sword or punch some poor bugger in the face. High profile abilities, as you have already worked out on your own, are the exact opposite. Use your free hand in High Profile and you'll viciously shove someone out of the way. Hold the A button and you'll sprint. Combine A and B and you'll charge along like a demented football player, barging people out of the way. High Profile kills are not necessarily deadlier but they are far more brutal. Instead of sneaking up behind someone and quickly, almost quietly (people have a habit of making a bit of a fuss when you puncture them with something sharp), high profile kills are big, flashy and also quite intimidating, often sending NPCs running away in terror.

The most important factor of High Profile movement is free running. When moving in High Profile, hitting the A button will cause Altair to jump, and, if there's something close enough to grab on to he will start to clamber up surfaces. It does take a while to get used to the fact that once on a wall the player doesn't need to continuously press buttons or keep buttons held down to continue climbing – once on a surface the controls are smart enough to keep you moving in the same fashion. Climbing is a simple matter of moving Altair with the left thumbstick, manoeuvring him around to find the next handhold. The climbing animations are especially impressive, as Altair realistically repositions his hands and feet to get the best purchase. None of the animations are pre-rendered so climbing the same building twice could lead to radically different paths and climbing animations.

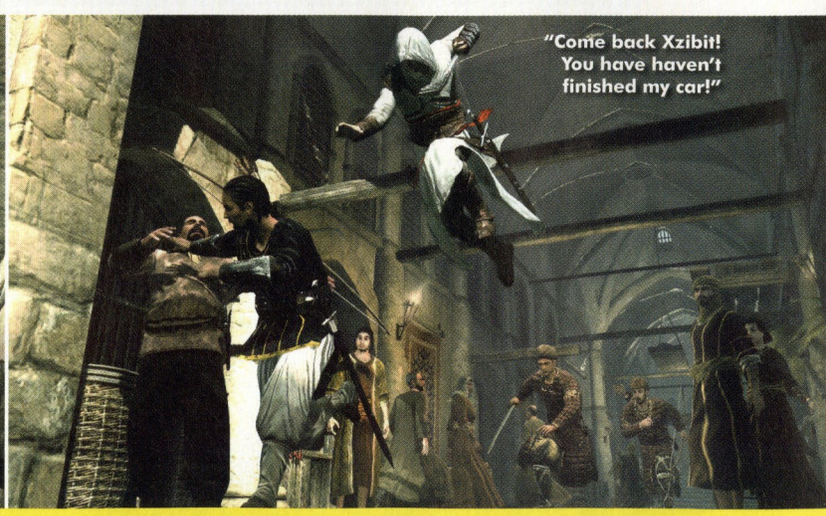
The fact that you don't constantly have to press buttons or be on your toes when it comes to climbing may sound a little dull but it practise it's anything but. During our brief

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Two words: final code.



Altair perfects his Sylvester Stallone in Cliffhanger impersonation



"Come back Xzibit! You have haven't finished my car!"

Creed

time with the game we climbed the highest building we could find, skirting around all of the spires, looking for new paths upwards (sometimes something of a puzzle) and enjoying the ever-increasing view of the city far below.

Although High Profile moves are both fun and incredibly well animated, they do have the nasty habit of alerting patrolling guards to the fact that there may be a little something amiss. If Altair's heat becomes too high, as shown by a health bar/suspicion meter on the HUD (see boxout), the crafty Assassin has a number of ways to evade capture and hide out until the suspicion passes. Sitting on a bench in amongst normal citizens will sometimes do the trick, as will walking slowly with his head down, pretending to be a scholar or monk, but often Altair will have to resort to more extreme measures to lose his pursuers. If the player chooses to remain at street level they can hide out in haystacks, waiting until the guards give up on their pursuit. If they head to the rooftops, players can hide out in roof gardens. Aside form lowering Altair's profile, hiding out has the additional benefit of replenishing the assassin's health.

SWIRLY

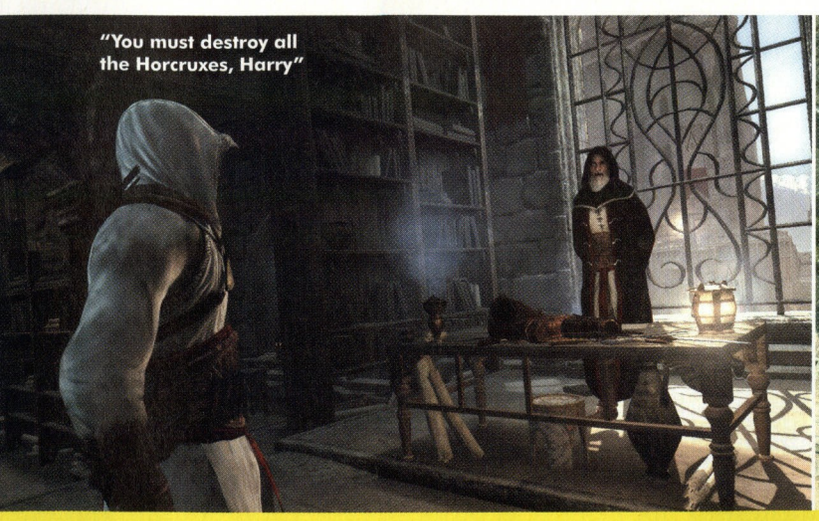
The HUD in Assassin's Creed is odd, to say the least, definitely hinting at the as yet mysterious science-fiction elements alluded to in the various game demos and trailers we've seen. Very anachronistic in appearance, the HUD features a button map in the top right hand corner showing what each of the face buttons does in high and low profile and a health bar surrounded by a DNA style helix that also includes a suspicion meter showing how much attention guard are paying to Altair's movements. We really, really want to know what's going on there.

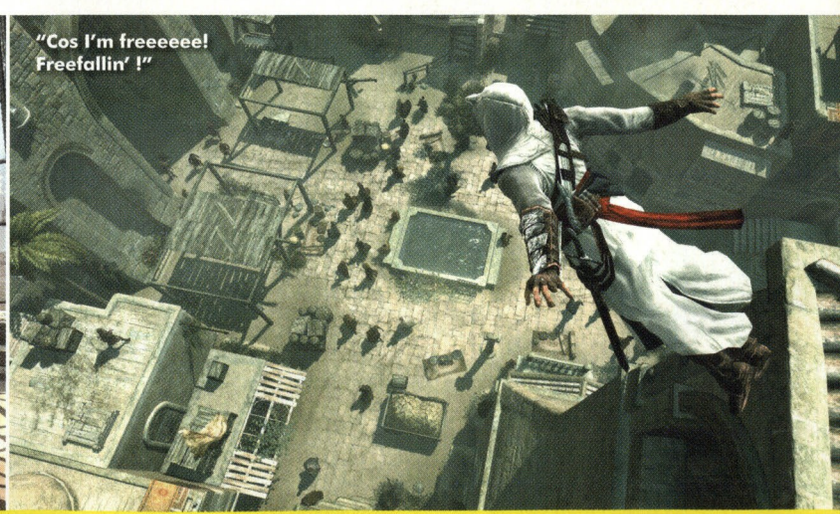
GETTING HIGH

Climbing isn't a purely aesthetic pastime in Assassin's Creed. Not only is touring the rooftops useful for keeping yourself away from the eyes of the general populace, the highest roofs are also necessary vantage points for Altair to use his Eagle Vision ability – one of his most useful when planning an assassination. The Eagle Vision ability enables Altair to scan the area, highlighting the different NPC according to their purpose, so he can see who is an enemy, who is neutral and who is useful, having either information of equipment.

Although we won't know the real purpose of the move until we get our hands on the final review code, getting up nice and high also enables Altair to pull off his spectacular "Leap of Faith" move – as long as there is a pile of hay somewhere beneath him. When taking the leap, Altair swan-dives from his vantage point, twisting at the last minute to land back first in the pile of straw. Whilst this is undoubtedly the fastest way to descend from a high vantage point we're assuming that other uses for the move will become clearer when we actually get to play through the game.

2007 is truly becoming a fine year for gaming. Every month it seems as though another game comes around that is destined to be a classic – so far we've had such brilliant games as Twilight Princess, God of War II, BioShock, The Darkness and more – we can't wait to receive review code for Assassin's Creed to see if it lives up to our expectations and joins that list of truly brilliant creations. <<





WET

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **Action** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Artificial Mind & Movement** • Due: **2008**

Either someone is very aware of everything that is going on and is having a good laugh or Sierra is totally oblivious to some rather adult acronyms but the upcoming game Wet reads like the name of a porn film. The game is called Wet. The production house is called A2M (thankfully an acronym for Artificial Mind & Movement, not something talked about at great length in Clerks II). If you don't know what that means, more power to you. If you do, have a good laugh now. Anyway, questionable naming decisions aside, Wet is looking like a rather interesting looking game, an acrobatics shooter with melee elements, all tied together with a story about a deadly female problem solver by the name of Ruby, a woman willing to do anything for the right price, whether it be steal, protect or kill. Of course, we doubt that there will be too many situations in the game, which Sierra is hyping as an over the top action game, that will not involve killing so the first two parts of the problem solving job seem a little moot.

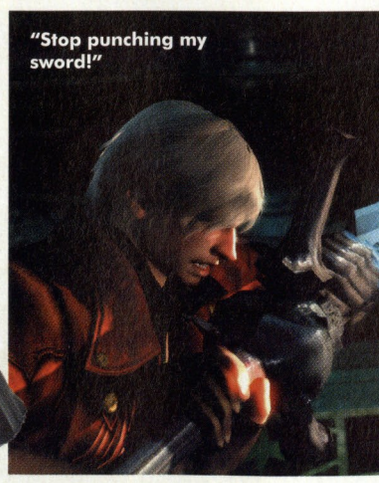
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Something that actually is unique as far as gameplay is concerned.

RUBY, DUPPY, DUPPY, RUBY

We're not too sure about how the story will progress as yet but there is something in the scripting that does excite us; the story is being written by Duppy Demetrius, not exactly a household name but the man responsible for crafting the stories for five seasons of 24. He also sounds like a character from a government sponsored show designed to warn children against the evils of drug abuse. Plot aside, there are a few things that make Wet look quite interesting. For starters, Ruby's body is modelled in two halves (the top and bottom) enabling her to pull off a variety of moves simultaneously, such as hanging upside-down from a ladder whilst shooting a horde of enemies, spinning around a stripping pole whilst shooting or, well, you get the idea – she can do a lot of things and shoot at the same time. Both of Ruby's twin pistols can also be aimed independently, with one being locked on a target leaving the other to be aimed with the thumbsticks.

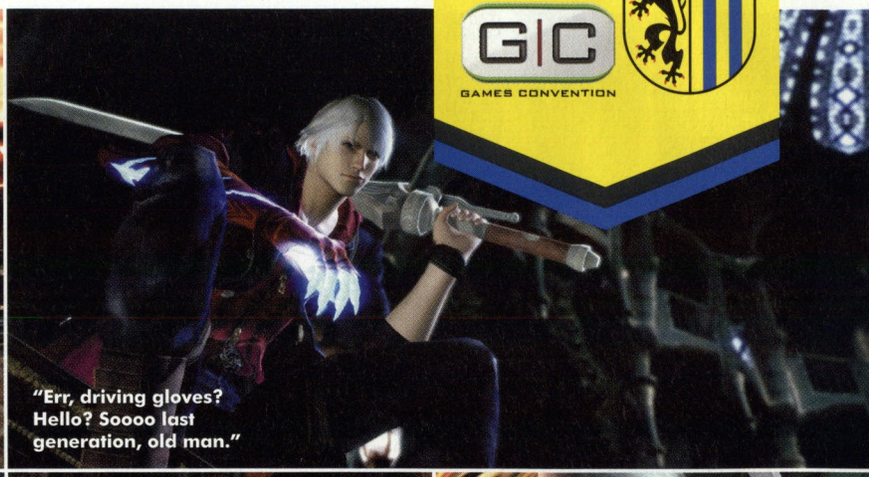
Although Sierra have used the term "unique" a hell of a lot in their press for Wet, there really isn't a lot that we've seen in the game so far that says anything unique at all. The combination of swords, guns and acrobatics was done rather successfully in Oni a number of years ago, Twin Calibur and BloodRayne (a game which also featured an acrobatic female protagonist equipped with guns and blades) feature independently targeting weapons and Prince of Persia has featured the promised movement puzzled. That said, there's nothing wrong with being derivative if you get the mix right. Hands on code probably won't be available for some time yet considering that Wet isn't due for release until an unspecified time in 2008 so we'll reserve our judgment until then. <<

Nice tats - no, that's not a typo



"Stop punching my sword!"

"Look. I've got stubble. Obviously I'm cooler."


"Err, driving gloves? Hello? Soooo last generation, old man."

Devil May Cry 4

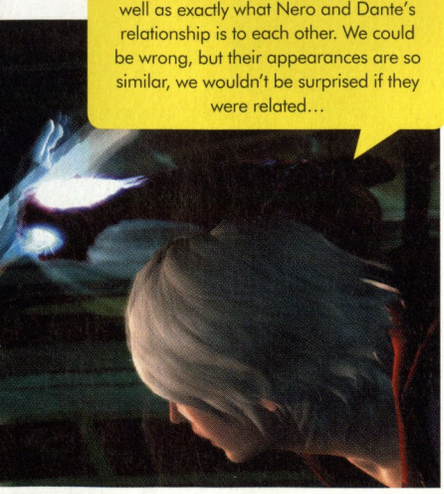
X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **Action/Adventure** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Capcom** • Due: **TBA**

The last time we looked at Devil May Cry 4 was way back in Hyper issue #164. At the time the game's new protagonist, Nero, had just been introduced, we found out a little information about his "Devil Bringer" special abilities, and Dante had been revealed as a villain of sorts, but much of the rest of the game was still very much shrouded in a very mysterious and shroudy shroud of mystery.

Capcom's showing at this year's Leipzig Games Convention lifted the shroud somewhat, as not only did they unveil a new trailer for the game, but they even let punters get some hands-on time with Nero on both the PS3 and the Xbox 360, making more than a few DMC fanboys shed tears of joy.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We'd really like to know more about the two new villains Capcom revealed, as well as exactly what Nero and Dante's relationship is to each other. We could be wrong, but their appearances are so similar, we wouldn't be surprised if they were related...



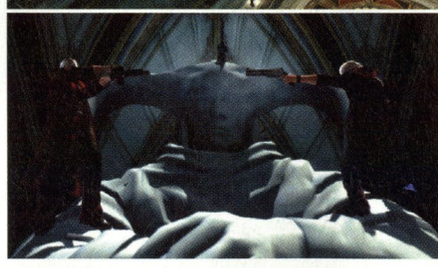
BODACIOUS TA-TAS

First up was the new trailer, and although it did feature a few new snippets of game footage, there were few surprises, with the majority of the clips made up of recycled footage we'd seen in previous trailers. Nero shooting off two bullets at a time from his double-barrelled pistol was still in there, as well as that brutal two-boots to the face he delivers to Dante, and although it did look fantastic, we'd seen all this before, where was the new stuff? There was an exception, however, as the trailer revealed two of the game's newest villains (or at least they are portrayed as villains in the trailer), although one's entrance was certainly more revealing than the other. The first is introduced with a lingering full-body pan, which stops momentarily at the bust to give DMC fans a better peek at her bodacious ta-tas. While she doesn't do anything in the trailer, besides shaking what her mama gave her, the dark-skinned, white-haired beauty does certainly appear to be a formidable opponent, if only for the distraction factor. The other new antagonist doesn't seem nearly as appealing, being more of the quasi-militant, greasy-emo-fringed variety. We'll enjoy taking him out.

Next of course was the gameplay. On display at Leipzig was a combat-heavy level that saw you controlling Nero, and served to introduce the player to his abilities, including that new Devil Bringer arm. It was essentially the same gameplay that Capcom showed at this year's E3, only slightly refined, and they were now showing it on the Xbox 360 as well, instead of only the PS3.

For all Capcom's claims that Nero is an all-new character, he essentially plays just like a re-skinned Dante, and only slightly re-skinned at that, since with their almost identical costumes and matching hairstyles, they could be twins.

Like Dante, Nero's attacks include shooting and slashing, thanks to Blue Mary, his twin-barrelled revolver and the Red Queen, a giant oversized sword. Despite only being a six-shooter, Blue Mary pumps out an endless supply of bullets, just like Dante's pistols, Ebony and Ivory and similarly the swordplay in DMC4 is remarkably familiar. Unlike Dante, however, Nero is gifted with the demonic power of his Devil Bringer arm, which can be powered up to deliver a crushing blow to your foes, or to pull them closer towards you so you can deliver more pain with your sword.



A true display of marksmanship

The technique seemed particularly effective against the game's newest enemy, an army of roast-chicken-looking mutants. Tasty.

Quite surprisingly, the buzz on the showroom floor was that the Xbox 360 version actually managed to outclass the PS3 version in the visuals department. They do both look almost indistinguishably close, though, so whatever platform you're playing, Devil May Cry 4 will still look devilishly good. <<

» Like Dante, Nero's attacks include shooting and slashing

WipEout HD

X360 **PS3** Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **Racing** • Players: **1** • Developer: **SCE Studio Liverpool** • Due: **TBA**

We're not quite sure if Sony were intending any kind of symbolism, but at this year's Leipzig show the position in which they chose to unveil the demo units for the upcoming WipEout HD, was bizarre to say the least. In front of a row of open toilet cubicles, Sony sat gamers down on a porcelain throne put a SixAxis in their hands and let them get to grips with the newly beautified version of the classic futuristic racer.

We still can't decide if Sony was trying to tell us that WipEout HD is so good that it will make you lose control of your bowels, but thankfully, WipEout HD definitely looks like it will be pant-wettingly exciting, rather that being a load of old crap...

HEH HEH, "WIPE"

With WipEout HD, Sony and SCE Studio Liverpool (formerly Psygnosis) are aiming at reminding us all about just how good the WipEout series has been over the years.

The game is a remake of sorts, but instead of focusing on a single game in the series, WipEout HD will collect together tracks and vehicles from all of the previous WipEout games, going all the way back to the original PSone-era WipEout, right through to the most recent games in the series.

On hand at the Leipzig GC, Sony had only two tracks and two selectable teams on show. The vehicles were from WipEout stalwarts Feisar and AG Systems and the two tracks, Chenghou Project and Anulpha Pass, were both drawn from the fairly recent PSP release, WipEout Pure.

Earning its "HD" subtitle, WipEout HD runs at a full 1080p, and while it doesn't look nearly as advanced as a typical PlayStation 3 title (for that, we'll have to wait for the inevitable PS3 sequel), the game's familiar tracks and hovercraft still manage to look better than ever before.

Featuring increased track detail, higher-poly ship models, and advanced lighting effects including an overdose of bloom effects on the exhaust trails and weapon blasts all make WipEout HD look almost next-gen, and to its credit the game runs as a smoother-than-smooth framerate, at speeds far faster than your puny human brain can comprehend. In other words, it looks good.

Where's Matthew Reilly when you need him?

Hopefully, by the time we get to see some tracks that have been remade from the original PSone games, it will also mean and end to the chronic pop-up and draw-in that the older WipEouts suffered. For long-time series fans, this feature alone would probably justify the game's purchase.

In terms of gameplay, this is classic WipEout as you remember it. The X button functions as your velocitator, while the trigger buttons are your left and right decelematrix, all you have to do is gun it through the twisting-turning, roller-coaster-like tracks while simultaneously keeping the competition at bay with an arsenal of weapons. Pure classic WipEout here folks.

Since the game will be a download-only title, available from the PlayStation Network Store, selling for what we could only presume will be a price low enough to not break our piggy banks, this may well end up being the first must-play PSN title. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We'd like some more info on exactly what tracks, weapons and ships will be available in the final game. We have fond memories of the Piranha team from WipEout 2097 – and we hope they'll be in there!

Where's all of the Red Bull advertising?

leipzig GC GAMES CONVENTION

The guy in red has been sun-bathing a little to long

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Like many of the newly announced games from this year's Leipzig GC, there's still very little information about Dead Island's story and/or finer gameplay points. We're hoping to get Techland to spill the beans sooner rather than later.

Dead Island

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **First Person Shooter** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Techland** • Due: **Late 2008**

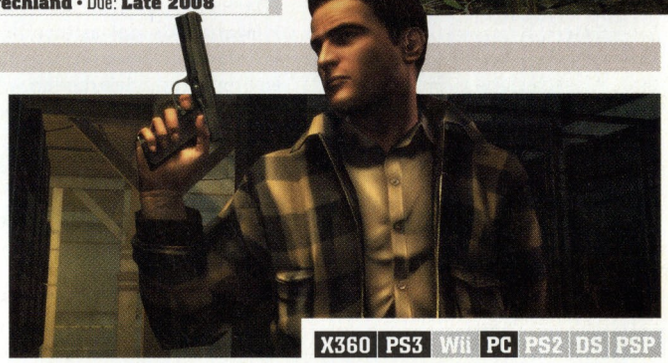
Polish developer Techland certainly are turning into a very prolific studio. No sooner had the team released the excellent Western-theme first-person shooter, Call of Juarez, that they had moved on to not one, but two new projects. The first is of course the fantastic-looking Warhound (which is also previewed this issue), while the second is a game that looks to combine two of our favourite things – beautiful paradisaical tropical islands, and slavering, brain-hungry zombies.

Could the premise of Dead Island get any cooler? Well, technically yes, but that would only be if there were ninjas involved. And Vampires. And polar bears. And Zeppelins. And explosions. As it stands Dead Island looks like it will be a whole lot of beautifully gory fun.

The sneak-peak at the game available at the Leipzig GC was brief, and amounted to maybe a minute of footage at the most. Set to a cheesy soundtrack of '80s reggae pop, it all starts out with a sweeping look at the gorgeous island location, taking us through the palm forests, along the sandy beaches with their crystal clear blue water and on to a few nearby resort huts and pools. The island part of Dead Islands certainly looks idyllic, and really makes other tropical games like Far Cry show their age.

The dead part of the game, however, inevitably surfaces, with a few flashes of the game's protagonist fighting off the undead with the FPS weapon of choice – a crowbar. Just what Techland's latest shooter will have in store for us is still a mystery, but we're going to relish finding out more than a zombie relishes brains. Mmmmm... braaaiiins... <<

Top 'o the world ma!



X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP

Mafia 2

Category: **FPS** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Illusion Softworks** • Due: **TBA**

We had a love-hate relationship with Mafia. See, on one level it was mediocre. More than a few of the missions were frustrating, poorly-designed messes. And the city the game was set in—the fictional metropolis of Lost Heaven, a sort of amalgamation of New York and Chicago—had a helluva lot less for the virtual tourist to do than Grand Theft Auto III's Liberty City, which we'd visited only a few months prior.

Two things made Mafia—personality and plot. Mafia had that authentic 30s gangster feel—smuggling alcohol, blasting rivals away with a Tommy gun, going to town with a baseball bat. The story was strong. Your avatar, cab driver turned wise guy Thomas Angelo, actually developed as a character—a rarity in this medium. The conclusion of his tale remains one of the most memorable and best game endings to this day.

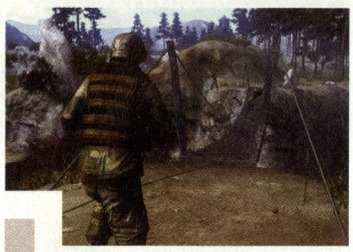
If you actually made it past some of those god-awful missions to that ending, you're likely looking at the heading of this piece in a mix of curiosity and bafflement. Yes, despite certain events that occurred at the end of the original Mafia, a sequel is indeed in the works at Czech developer Illusion Softworks.

Mafia II's story will be set in the late 40s and early 50s, we're told. It's unclear if we'll still be in Lost Heaven, but there will obviously be a completely new cast. This time around, our hero—or anti-hero, maybe—will be Vito. Little more is known about him or, indeed the game itself. The teaser that's kicking around online, while offering enough to tease the appetite—rock and roll, brutal mob violence, philosophising about vegetarians—doesn't reveal a great deal of anything, really, other than that Mafia II looks hot. At this point, 2K Games and Illusion Softworks are upholding a strict code of silence. <<

Warhound

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **FPS** • Players: **1+** • Developer: **Techland** • Due: **2008**

If you ever played Mercenaries and wanted a little more freedom to blow crap up, Warhounds looks as though it could be the game for you. Players will take the role of a hardened mercenary, taking high paying jobs to fly around the world and blow shit up. From what we've seen the general format of the game will see players choosing jobs from a world map, planning the insertion and action and finally carrying through with the mission.



One of the most interesting aspects of Warhounds appears to be the fact that the player can choose the way they wish to be inserted into the action. Each manner of deployment costs money, but the cheaper the insertion the more time it takes for the player to get to the target; taking a speedboat will drop you further away from an inland target than an airdrop but will cost you far less money. Although the cheaper option may sound appealing to all those looking to horde the filthy lucre, it should be pointed out that the character will not be the only mercenary going for the job – take too long and some other merc may achieve the objective before you.

Warhounds look as though it will push the boundaries as far as environmental destruction, with players being able to cut down trees with a hail of gunfire, smash everything with explosives or artillery, crash through woodland and buildings in tanks and generally behave in a way that would make Greenpeace (the old environmental Greenpeace, not the modern anti-globalisation incarnation) very cranky. <<

This screen is getting dangerously close to showing "tradesman's crack"

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some kind of co-op gameplay that would allow two or more mercs to team up on hard jobs.

Sabotage

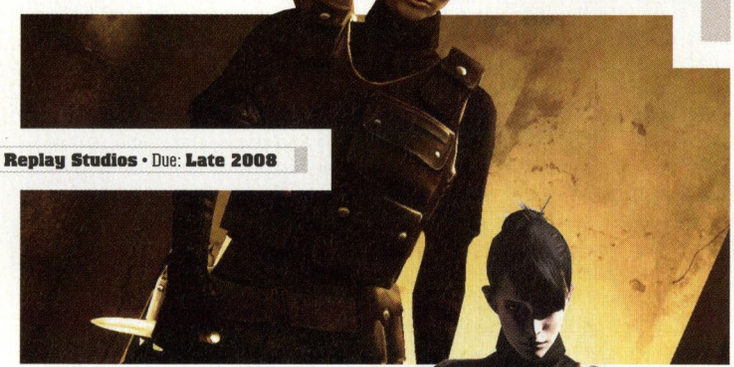
X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **Stealth/Action** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Replay Studios** • Due: **Late 2008**

Once called Sabotage 1943, Replay Studios' recently renamed Sabotage has been floating around in development circles for years. The first time we heard about it must have been at least three years ago, and despite looking promising at each of its public showings, the game has not only never seen release, but for a long time it didn't even have a publisher.

After the 2007 Leipzig GC, the dubiously named Gamecock Publishing took care of that, securing the rights to the WWII steal/action game for a late 2008 release.

So what should we expect to see from the game at around about this time next year? Of what we've seen of the game from its Leipzig unveiling, we should probably expect quite a lot.

Sabotage sees you taking the role of a very beautiful and very British female spy named Violet Summer, who is sent across Europe to covertly organise the resistance against the reliably evil Nazi menace. She'll need to use ever trick of the stealth/action genre to stay alive in enemy-controlled territory, including all the usual hiding, sneaking and stealth kills, as well as plenty of gunplay on the side.



Killing Nazis with the power of eurobabes

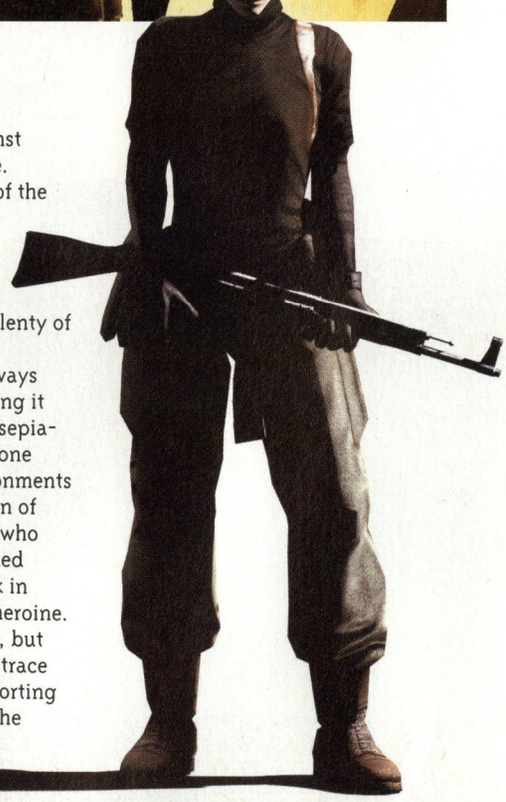
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More gameplay! The game looks promising in the rolling demos Replay Studios have shown so far, but we won't be satisfied until we actually get some hands-on time.

Even though it's about the French in WWII, Sabotage is not the world's first surrender simulator

Visually, Sabotage was always pretty, but at its latest showing it looked better than ever. The sepia-toned world recalls a long-gone era, and the authentic environments seem extremely realistic. Then of course there's Violet herself, who despite looking like she walked straight off a fashion catwalk in 2007, still looks like a great heroine.

It's release is a while away, but we'll definitely be keeping a trace on Sabotage, and will be reporting its actions back to you over the coming year! <<



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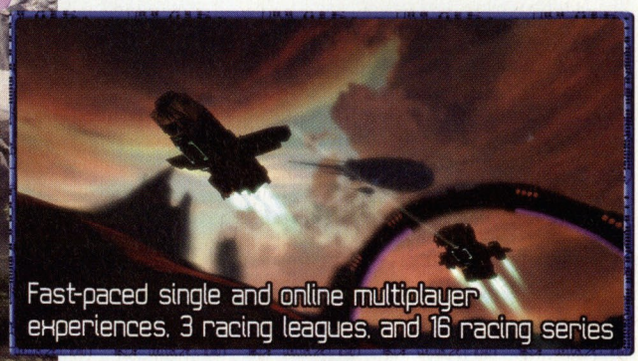

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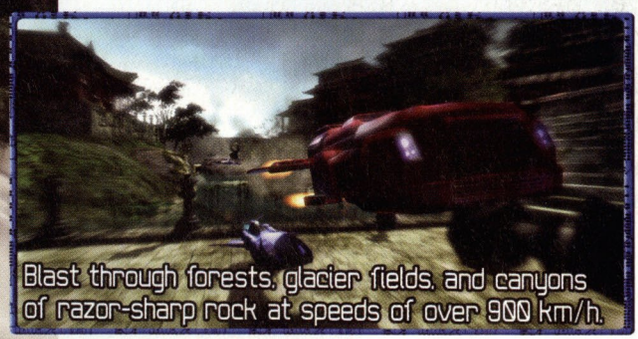

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Jump in.

XBOX 360™ LIVE™

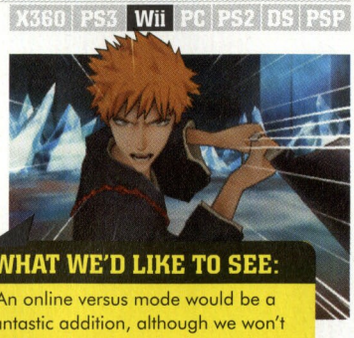
Bleach: SHATTERED BLADE

Category: **Fighting** • Players: **1-2** • Developer: **Polygon Magic** • Due: **Late 2007**

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

Bleach is just one of a rash of Weekly Shonen Jump comics to make it big outside of Japan in the last couple of years, along with the likes of One Piece and Naruto, and like those two, Bleach is getting the videogame treatment.

Shown on the Wii at the Leipzig GC was Bleach: Shattered Blade, a one-on-one fighting game using full motion controls. You can move your fighter using the nunchuk's analogue stick, while slashing and stabbing with the Wiimote.



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

An online versus mode would be a fantastic addition, although we won't hold our breath on that happening.

The look of the game is highly reminiscent of not only the anime, but also the original manga. The characters and arenas are cel-shaded in the style of the anime, and have a thick black outline, just like the comics. Whenever a special move is performed, sound effects are also splashed across the screen in Japanese, and comic book-style panels often pop onto the screen show your fighter's close-up reactions. Keep an eye out for our close-up reactions to the game in future issues of Hyper... <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

There's also a sequel to Blade of Fate that's already released in Japan. We hope that this game is good enough to warrant bringing that one to the rest of the world as well!

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

What we'd like to know more like it – what the hell do you do in the game?

Ninjatown

Category: **?** • Players: **?** • Developer: **Southpeak** • Due: **2008**

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

We honestly have no idea what style of game Ninjatown will turn out to be but we're still looking forward to seeing more. Why? Well, it's about ninjas for a start, and that's pretty rad. These, however, are not your everyday ninjas. Ninjatown is inhabited by Wee Ninjas, little blobby dudes who do heroically ninja things like protect the innocent and farm dark chocolate. Wee Ninjas are so ninja (the ninj better than almost everyone) that everything they do is full of ninjosity – there are Business Ninjas, Ninja Analysts, Old Ninjas and Ninja Consultants. Hell, even Wee Ninja poo is a Ninja Dropping. Yeah, we're as confused as you are but still – ninjas. Lots and lots of ninjas. <<

Bleach: BLADE OF FATE

Category: **Fighting** • Players: **1-4** • Developer: **Treasure** • Due: **Late 2007**

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

Along with the Wii Beach game, the Nintendo DS's Blade of Fate was shown off this month. The game has been available for ages in Japan, but finally, it looks as though the dramatic rise in popularity of the anime and manga in the West has sparked an interest in publishing it in the rest of the world.

Like Bleach: Shattered Blade, the DS version is essentially a straightforward 2D fighting game, although it does have a few unique features. Each playing field has two planes that your fighters can switch between and four players can be on-screen at once. It's sort of like a cross between the old Fatal Fury games, and Guilty Gear Isuka, only with Bleach characters.

The touch screen is used to access special attacks, which show up on the bottom screen as little cards. You can alter what special cards show up on your touch-screen via a deck builder, adding a certain collectible card game element to the game. Plus it's made by Treasure, one of our all-time favourite developers, so things are looking up for this DS battler. <<

Now all we need is a good One Piece game for Malks

Borderlands

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **FPS** • Players: **1+** • Developer: **Gearbox** • Due: **2008**

Think of all of the weapons that have appeared in FPS games and lump them all together in a giant shooty pile. You may think that is a lot of weapons but Gearbox is looking to prove you wrong. Their upcoming Mad Max meets Stranger in a Strange Land FPS game. Using a clever procedural generation system, Borderlands will apparently be able to create over half a million weapons, as well as different kinds f armour and unique objects. Borderlands will also include the ability for the player to level up their character RPG style (although Gearbox are quick to point out that Borderlands is an FPS first and foremost), multiple drivable vehicles, multiple character classes and one hell of a sexy engine. There's no word as yet as to whether or not the game will feature some kind of competitive multiplayer but it can be safely assumed it will. We can't wait to see more. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Examples of how the procedural engine generates weapons and armour.

Nitrobike

Category: **Racing** • Players: **1-Multi** • Developer: **Left Field Productions** • Due: **Early 2008**

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP

You may remember Left Field Productions best from their stint as a second-party Nintendo developer during the N64 era. During that tie they produced Excitebike 64, a successor to the NES classic, which saw you gunning a dirt-bike around a track filled with enough jumps to bring up a pro rider's lunch.

Left Field broke away from Nintendo several years ago, but their latest effort for the Wii has a definite Excitebike feel to it. In fact, apart from the slightly different title, Nitrobike may as well be an Excitebike sequel.

Promising to play very much like the Wii's Excite Truck, Nitrobike will use the Wiimote exclusively for motion-sensitive controls, and will feature 20 tracks filled with countless opportunities for nitro-fuelled shenanigans, as well as online play, a rarity for Wii games.

In short, Left Field's claims that Nitrobike will be "one badass ride" definitely seem to be founded in reality. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We hope that Left Field can manage to slip in a few sly references to Excitebike 64 – that game was awesome.

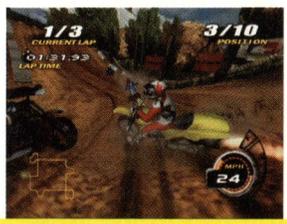


Table Tennis

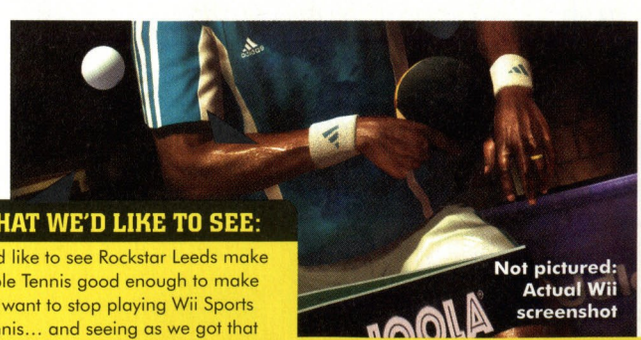
Category: **Sports** • Players: **1-2** • Developer: **Rockstar Leeds** • Due: **Late 2007**

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP

When Table Tennis released on the Xbox 360 last year, it came as somewhat of a pleasant surprise. Not only was it relatively cheap to buy, clocking in at about half the price of a standard next-gen title, but it was also surprisingly playable.

Now, what other console so perfectly lends itself to the sport of table tennis than the Wii? The answer to that is, of course, none. Realising this, Rockstar Leeds have decided to port the game, with complete motion-controls, to Nintendo's white wonder.

Visually the game doesn't quite match the sheen of the X360 version, but it certainly doesn't look bad. While rendering a tiny room, one table and two characters isn't exactly hard, we can't help but admire the diminutive Wii for looking so close to the original. The real difference is in the motion controls, which see you flicking the Wiimote to perform different serves and shots, as well as two other options that allow you to control your characters movements with the nunchuk. <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We'd like to see Rockstar Leeds make Table Tennis good enough to make us want to stop playing Wii Sports Tennis... and seeing as we got that game for free, it'd better be good!

They

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP

Despite the rather generic (not to mention lacklustre) name, there is a lot to get excited about with They. For a start, even at this incredibly early stage of development the game is looking very polished, with a brilliant proprietary engine allowing for full physics integration and fully destructible environments. The plot about a near future London being plagued by terrorist attacks until a mysterious robot force appears and starts laying waste to all and sundry intrigues us as well. All of this, however, pales in comparison to the weapons that will appear in the final game. Along side the regular line-up of FPS staples, players will also be able to create their own weapons from parts picked up on the battlefield. Although there is no final number as yet, Metropolis are saying that they plan to have around 250 different gun parts to play with. That's a lot of options right there. <<

leipzig GC GAMES CONVENTION

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
How the gun modification system actually works.

Category: **FPS** • Players: **1+** • Developer: **Metropolis** • Due: **2009**

Sonic Riders: ZERO GRAVITY

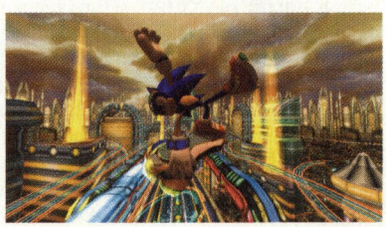
Category: **Racing** • Players: **1-Multi** • Developer: **Sonic Team** • Due: **Early 2008**

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

Well, aren't we saps. Here we were, thinking that Sega were actually being genuine when they said that they were going to give the Sonic franchise a rest for a while after the disastrous PS3 and Xbox 360 next-gen game, when yet another blue hedgehogged spin-off comes out of the woodwork.

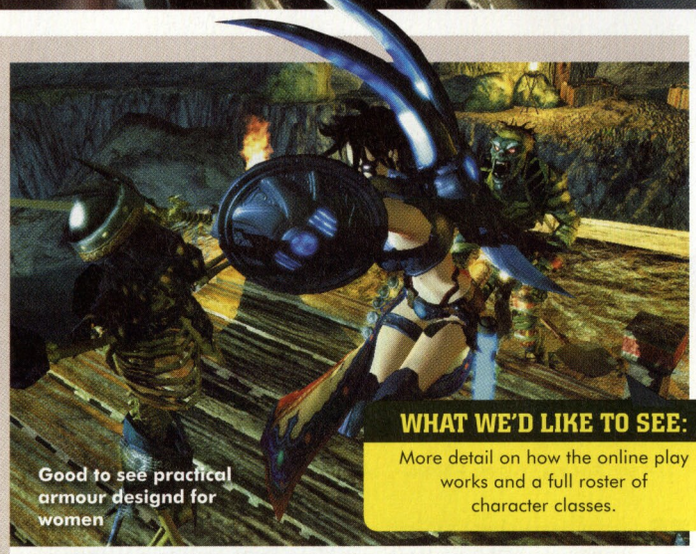
Admittedly, we never really thought Sega could keep their hands off their little money-maker for too long, and at least Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity looks far better than its hoverboard-racing predecessor.

With prettier visuals, and a story that involves "chasing after the legend of the shooting star" (whatever that is), Zero Gravity promises six characters to choose from, as well as improved racing and tracks. The Wii version will inevitably feature motion controls, while PS2 owners will be very happy to hear that it is also coming to ye olde PS2. Best of all, it looks like Riders 2 is going to carry on the tradition of Sonic games having awful pop/rock soundtracks – rad! <<



Just like herpes, Sonic is never really gone for good

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Could you tell we were being sarcastic about the Sonic series recent tendencies toward horrible pop/rock soundtrack? Honestly Sega, the original Sonic themes are classics! Build on those please.



Good to see practical armour designd for women

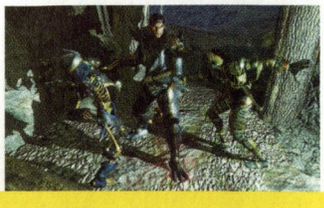
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
More detail on how the online play works and a full roster of character classes.

Sacred 2: FALLEN ANGEL

Category: **Action RPG** • Players: **1+** • Developer: **Ascaron** • Due: **2008**

X360 PS3 Wii **PC** PS2 DS PSP

The original Sacred was something of a sleeper hit amongst the Action RPG community, an unashamed Diablo clone with a huge world, good mechanics and an attractive, if somewhat functional graphics engine. Sacred 2: Fallen Angel is a far more ambitious beast. Not only is the game world bigger and more intricate, Sacred 2 will also feature online play. Whilst online play may not sound like anything new, the approach Ascaron is taking seems novel. Although players will be taking part in an essentially single player game, their character will be part of a shared world making it easy to join some co-op missions or duke it out in PVP. Should be interesting. <<



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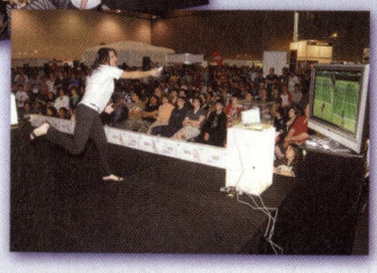

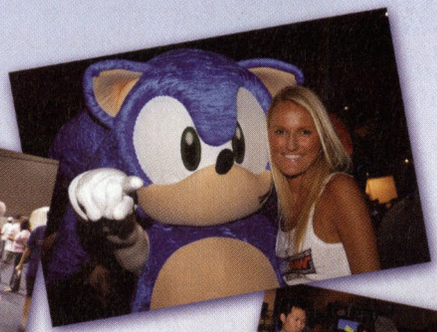

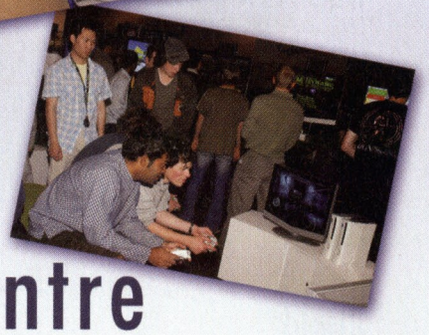

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White Gold: War in Paradise

X360 PS3 Wii **PC** PS2 DS PSP Category: **FPS/RPG** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Deep Shadows** • Due: **Late 2007**

Russian developer Deep Shadows is ambitious. Overly so, maybe. They're busy too; working on two titles—both gargantuan in scope—concurrently. The studio's taste for grandness didn't pay off with their debut release, Boiling Point: Road to Hell. Boiling Point's premise was genius, but the execution was deeply flawed. Whether or not it's going to pay off this time—or, indeed, with the other game they're working on, The Precursors—is impossible to predict at this stage.

The official word on White Gold: War in Paradise is that it's going to be a "freeplay role-playing game with first person shooter combat." Exactly like its predecessor Boiling Point, in other words.

Seeing as it's going to be—partly, anyway—a role-playing game, White Gold will grant you the ability to customise and develop your avatar in accordance with your preferences and personal play style. As you progress through the game, your character will gain experience points and level up, at which point they'll be able to acquire new abilities—although Deep Shadows calls them "perks" for some reason—or upgrade their existing ones. "Perks" won't necessarily be related to combat. Some will improve your trading and communication skills.

White Gold, you see, won't be one of those games where you'll be encouraged to simply run about, finger glued to the fire button. Again, it's a role-playing game. And Deep Shadows is really hoping that players will be prepared to take on a role other than that of a virtual genocidaire.

» The islands will be heavily populated by NPCs and liberally dotted with towns.

CHATTY, AREN'T YA?

Communication is going to be paramount in this game. Deep Shadows say that players will be required to wander about and talk to random non-player characters, a source of lucrative side quests. Apparently you'll even be able to chat up enemy soldiers and make deals with them—presumably the kind of deals that see their wallets gain a considerable amount of weight in a small amount of time.

Of course, sometimes words will fail you. Or you'll just feel more in the mood for playing the part of a Jack Carver-type than a Desmond Tutu. Either way, when the shit hits the fan and you're required to bust caps in arses, you'll be able to turn to an arsenal that's huge in terms of both size and scope.

Expect to see all the shooting game staples. Pistols and machineguns, rocket launchers and crossbows. Beyond that, there are a few weapons that are really ... out there, to say the least. One of them is a jar of honey. Seriously. A table spread of mass destruction.

At least some of the weapons will be upgradeable. Rifles, for instance, will be able to be outfitted with magnifying scopes and underslung grenade launchers. We have no idea if you'll be able to pimp your Capilano, though, but we'd be sorely disappointed if it turns out to not be possible.

Exploration will be important in White Gold. You'll be strongly encouraged to go off the beaten track to find missions and items and to hunt birds and other animals—a source of feathers and fur, which will apparently be in high demand in the local communities.

PIRATES OF THE?

The game is to be set in the Caribbean Basin. There will be at least eight islands in all to visit. Don't think for a moment that they to be merely about sun, sand, trees and sea, though. The islands will be heavily populated by non-player characters and liberally dotted with towns. The largest of the islands, we're told, will have some eight towns, all with a large number of buildings to explore.

You'll have a number of vehicles on hand for your explorative efforts. They range from helicopter gunships to battle tanks, inflatable motorboats to battered civilian

Thanks for the action-packed screen to caption, Malks

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

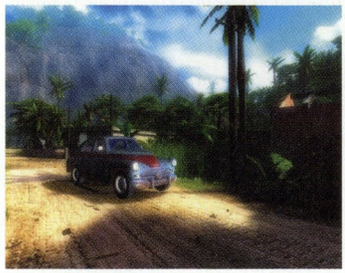
What we said in the September issue about The Precursors applies here too. Deep Shadows must learn that quality beats quantity every time ... just like all-you-can-eat restaurants.

cars, trucks to ... sea life. Sea life as in sharks and dolphins. We shit you not. White Gold will give you the ability to hijack—or "commandeer," as Johnny Depp would say—sharks and dolphins. Take that, Rockstar.

This wouldn't be a chain of tropical islands—or, indeed, the setting of a game with "War in Paradise" as a subtitle—if there wasn't a bit of good old-fashioned warring going on. Deep Shadows is yet to reveal anything specific about the plot, but has mentioned that there will be a number of bickering factions to appease and displease.

Your alignment will determine much more than who shoots at you and who doesn't. Shops, for instance, will raise or lower their prices based on your standing with the owner's faction of choice.

At this point in time, White Gold is slated to be a purely singleplayer affair. Deep Shadows are well-aware of the game's potential to be a co-op classic, but aren't ready to commit to a multiplayer mode until they're certain they'll have the time and resources required to do it properly. Of course, whether they'll have the resources to complete what's already on the drawing board is a bit of an issue too ...

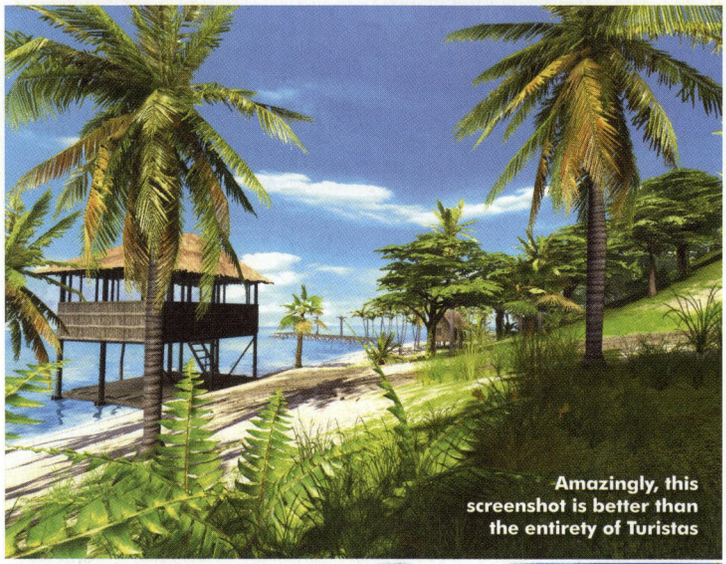


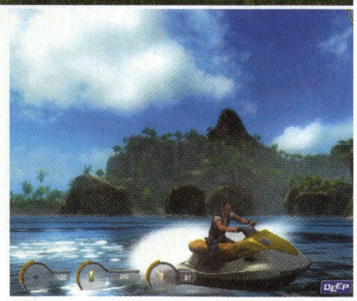
BIG MOUTHFUL

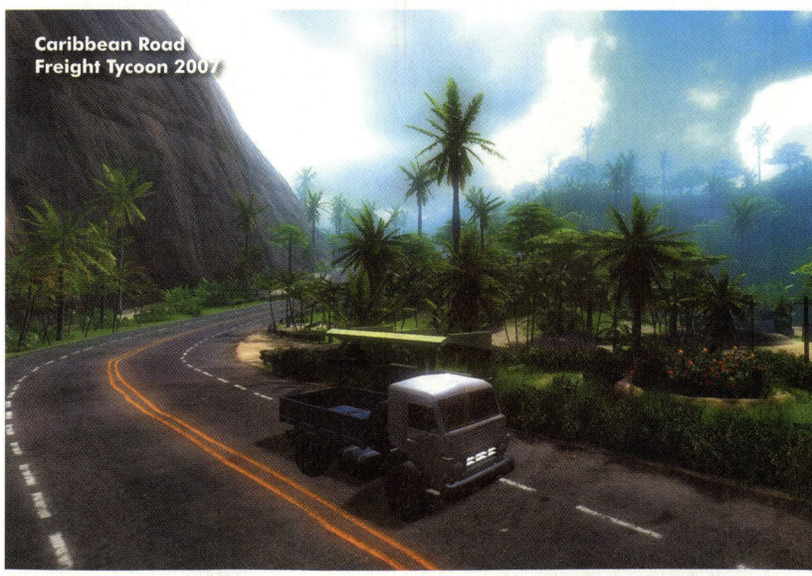
The concept behind White Gold is brilliant. Same with The Precursors and, for that matter, Boiling Point. There's no denying that. If all the ideas that the Deep Shadows team are kicking around for this game end up being realised—in the way they want them to be realised, mind you—they could very well have on their hands one of the great games of the decade.

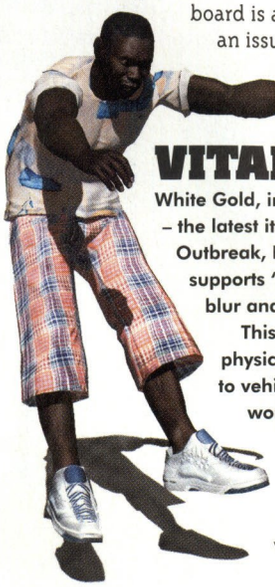
By constantly throwing more ideas into the mix, though, they're veering dangerously close to biting off more than they can chew. Of making like some guy who has just entered one of those all-you-can-eat restaurants and been told, half way through loading up his first plate, that the place is to close in ten minutes. Picture this guy stuffing into his mouth potato wedge after pizza slice after forkful of fettuccini, trying to get his ten buck's worth before he's booted out the door, until he finds himself choking and spluttering, coughing it all up, spitting it back onto his plate.

Nasty visual, but one befitting a promising project that, if the developers let their taste for scale and imaginations run too free on, could end up as disappointing as Boiling Point. <<









VITAL STATISTICS

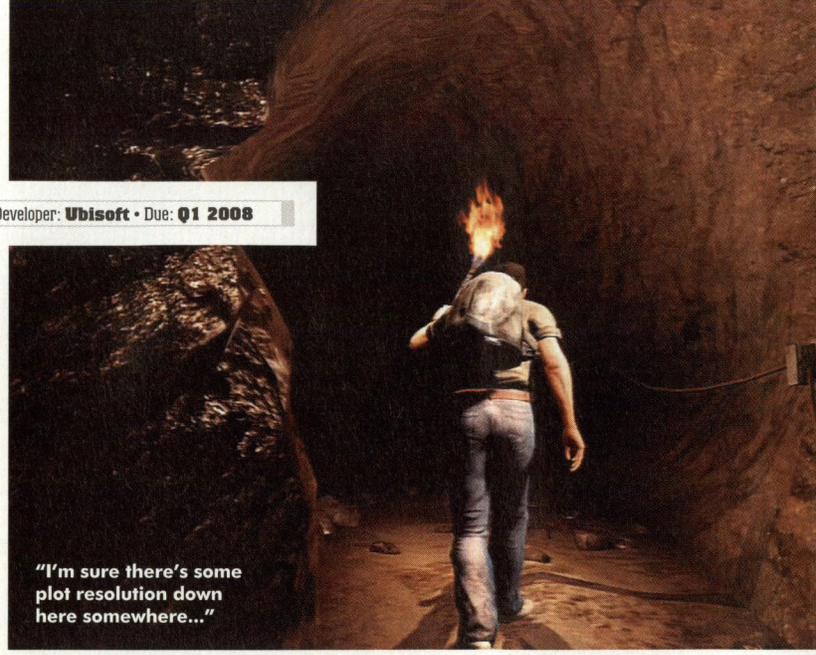
White Gold, in case you're curious, is based on Vital Engine 3 – the latest iteration of the engine that powered Codename: Outbreak, Boiling Point and The Precursors. We're told that it supports "all modern technologies", including HDR, motion blur and rag doll effects.

This version of Vital Engine apparently has superior physics to previous iterations, particularly when it comes to vehicles and environment destructibility. White Gold won't let you "destroy all objects [or] entire levels" – the demand on system resources would be too great – but you'll certainly be able to knock over watchtowers, destroy fences and shatter windows. That, Deep Shadows have assured, us will be enough for "sheer gaming pleasure."

Lost: The Game

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

Category: **Survival Adventure** • Players: **TBA** • Developer: **Ubisoft** • Due: **Q1 2008**



"I'm sure there's some plot resolution down here somewhere..."

Originally announced in mid-2006, very little has been revealed about Lost since, leading most of us to think the game would never see the light of day. It's been a long time coming, but everything seems to be back on track, with Ubisoft revealing details that tell us exactly what the game will be about, and how it will tie in with the Lost universe.

For those unfamiliar with the series, Lost centres on a group of plane crash survivors, stranded on an isolated tropical island after their flight from the United States to Australia crashes somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. Think Snakes on a Plane, except the plane crashes at the beginning, and there are no snakes. The remaining passengers are then forced to work together as they navigate the seemingly uninhabited land and try to piece together the mysteries of their journey in order to make their escape. While it may not be the most original plot for a television show (remember Gilligan's Island? Well actually, no), you can't deny that its story is a perfect fit for a video game.

ISLAND RECON ADVANCED SURVIVOR

Developed by Ubisoft, Lost is a survival adventure game based on the popular Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 game engine. Using a third person perspective, the game follows a brand new character, Elliott, another survivor from Oceanic Flight 815 who is stranded on the island with Jack, Kate and the rest of the Lost gang. While some of the show's mysteries and storylines will be featured through the adventure, the game will mostly focus on Elliott's personal experiences as he interacts with the other Lost characters, and sets out to explore, survive, and ultimately escape the island.

While the game focuses on Elliot's story, he isn't alone. Many of the show's key characters will make appearances throughought the game as they reveal clues and offer assistance on your quest. Characters that have been confirmed to be featured so far include Kate, Jack, Michael and Locke, but they may not always be there to help, and may even turn against you if you rub them the wrong way. It seems that people hopelessly stranded on desert islands tend to become a little cranky.

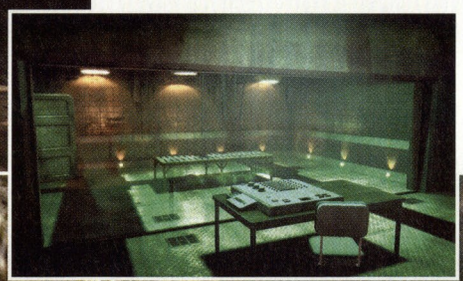
Alliances are the key to any strong team, and forging friendships will play an important role as you progress through the game. Walt, Sawyer, Sayid and Hurley are also expected to make an appearance, however it's unknown if any of the actors from the show will return to voice their characters in the game. Many of the show's villains including the Black Smoke and the Others are also set to make an appearance.

WHAT'S IN THE HATCH?

Many of the islands iconic locations are also heavily featured in the game.

The hatches, caves, jungle depths and even computer systems will all be able to be explored as the game unfolds. To assist with exploration, players will also have access to a special first person observation camera mode, where you'll be able to cut to a close up of your

Jack discovers the Lost Story Generator.



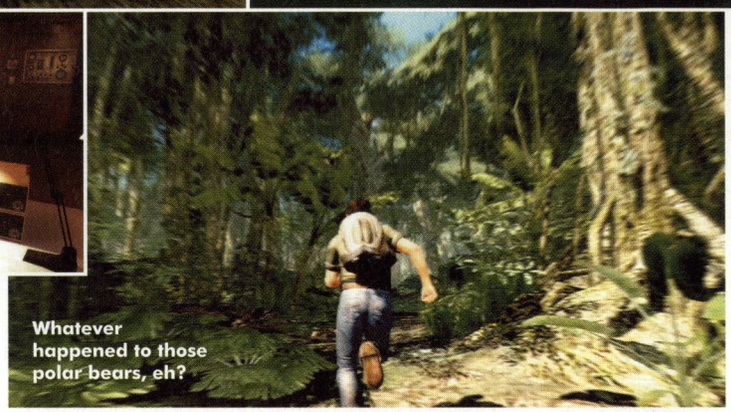
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

As many references to the series as possible. The game should reward both hardcore and casual fans by paying tribute to some of the show's most popular moments.

Locke – he's certainly come a long way since Final Fantasy VI

terrain for an even more detailed examination of your surroundings. Since the GRAW2 game engine was originally designed for urban-style environments, much of it is process of being optimised to accommodate Lost's exotic landscapes.

Just like the series, flashbacks will play a vital role in the game, allowing us to delve into Eliot's past, revealing crucial details of his past life, his strengths and weaknesses, what he's doing on the island, and maybe even how to escape. Flashbacks won't just be video clips either. Instead, they will be featured as actual levels of the game. As the game progresses, flashbacks will also reveal some surprising connections between Elliot and the show's already established characters.



Whatever happened to those polar bears, eh?

» flashbacks will play a vital role in the game, allowing us to delve into Eliot's past

The Lost series has always been about secrets, and while none of the show's mysteries will be completely revealed, the events in the game will help fans come to a better understanding of the Lost universe, and the puzzles within. Though a new character is the centre of the game's plot, his story will tie in with the events of the series, giving players the chance to explore both new and familiar parts of the island. In fact, delving through key locations from the series will reveal even more clues, and even some surprises along the way.

JAW, MEET GROUND

Since the game connects so closely with the show's intricate secrets and storylines, the team behind the Lost TV series have been involved in the game's development from the very beginning. In order to really capture the feel of the series, the game's storyline was written by former show writer Dawn Kelly, with Executive Producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse contributing to the games various other twists and turns, as well as its jaw-dropping conclusion.

The development team are also genuine fans of the series, with many watching and re-watching episodes over and over again to make sure the game is as faithful to the show as possible. The game's producers see the adventure not as a unrelated "side-project", but as a vital element of the Lost-series, and say that the secrets revealed within will help fans learn more about their favourite characters, and better understand the Lost universe.

No word yet on multiplayer or online modes, but Xbox Live and PlayStation Network support seems like an obvious addition given the show's large and very dedicated fan base. Lost's online community rank among the most hardcore fans you'll ever come across, rivalling only Heroes fans in terms of almost obsessive dedication to the series, and the team behind the game knows it. The Lost game is being developed from the ground up for long time fans of the show, and should be a real treat for those who have been waiting to explore the massive Lost universe for themselves.

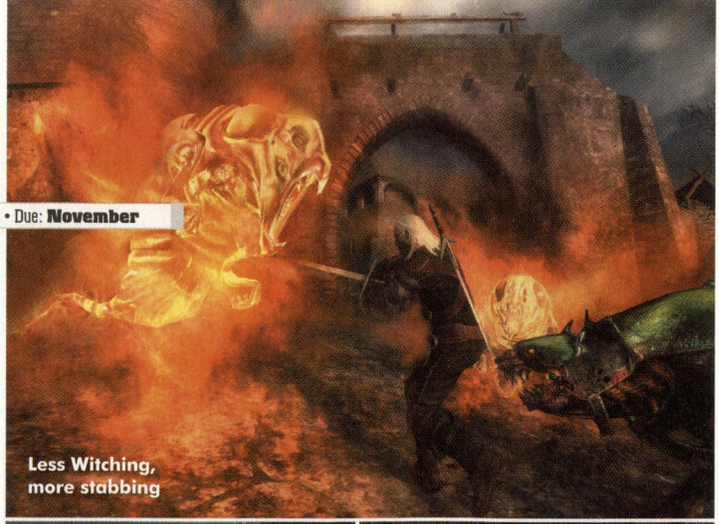
While many games based on television and movie franchises are often nothing more than poorly produced cash-ins designed to make a quick buck off an already popular license, it's clear that the team behind Lost are doing everything they can to make the videogame version something special. Ubisoft are going all-out to ensure that Lost: The Game has all the spark of the series, but can they pull it off? That mystery will be revealed early next year. <<

GET LOST (SIGH)

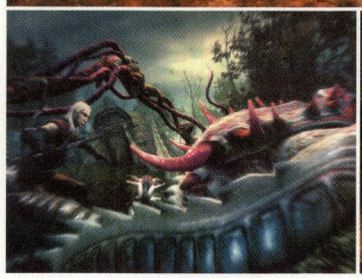
You'd have to be stranded on a desert island to have never heard of Lost. For the last three years it's been one of the most popular shows on television, and now it's heading to the gaming world. Imagine being stuck in the middle of nowhere without food, water, or even a Game Boy, all while dealing with blood thirsty savage tribes and frantically searching for a way to get home. While it may sound like a typical family get-together, it's also the plot of Lost, and while most games based on television and movie franchises somehow get lost in translation, Lost: The Game seems to be heading in the right direction.

The Witcher

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP Category: **RPG** • Players: **1** • Developer: **CD Projekt** • Due: **November**



Less Witching, more stabbing



The Witcher is a bit of an odd duck – a game based on an immensely successful and famous franchise that nearly nobody has ever heard of. Incredibly famous and successful in Poland (it has been likened to a Polish Harry Potter in terms of popularity), The Witcher is based on a series of books and short stories chronicling the adventures of Geralt, a Witcher; an infertile offshoot of humanity gifted with supernatural powers who makes a living as a monster hunter for hire. It's also a bit of an odd duck in the fact that it is, at heart, an action RPG but has a combat system that revolves around timing rather than mashing and that it's built using a rather antiquated graphics engine (BioWare's Aurora Engine, used in Neverwinter Nights) yet still looks gorgeous.

concepts, chief of which being the fact that non-human creatures such as elves and dwarves are treated much like the natives were during the settling of America or the blacks during apartheid, leading to hidden non-human terrorist cells fighting for independence and equal rights. Apparently much of the moral ambiguity in the game will come from how the player interacts with these non-human forces. Considering the fact that Geralt's status as a Witcher places him only slightly above the non-humans in the eyes of the public it should make for some interesting gaming.

Rather than wielding any weapon he can come across, Geralt is only truly proficient in two weapons, both of which are swords - a steel sword and a silver sword for special monstrous enemies immune to normal weapons. Although this does detract a little from the joy of constantly upgrading weapons in most RPGs, the way the experience system works should keep the combat evolving throughout play time. Each time Geralt levels he gain skill points to put into attributes and skills, as well as sub skills keyed to each attribute or skill – you can put your skills into strength to increase damage and maybe add a bleed effect to an attack or place them in the steel sword skill to increase the number of attacks in a combo, for example. How the character progresses may be up to the individual player but the alchemy skill is one every player must master to survive, making potions from a huge number of reagents and materials. To keep things interesting, all potions, no matter how beneficial, have a negative cumulative effect so players won't be able to chug them down willy-nilly.

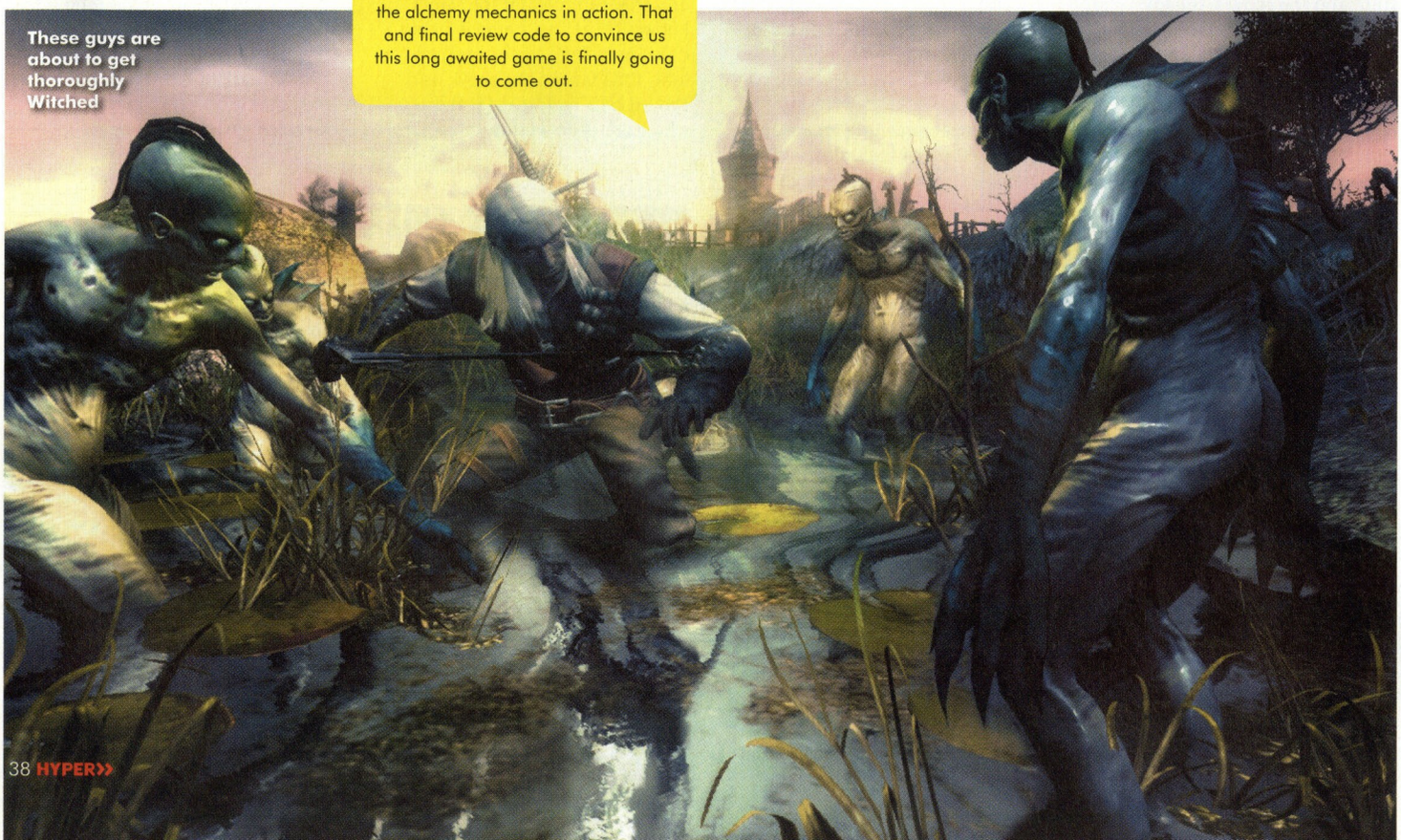
Geralt is only truly proficient in two weapons, both of which are swords

As seems to be the law when it comes to Eastern-European developed RPGs, Geralt, the hero, is an amnesiac, but rather than having no idea of who he is, the titular Witcher simply no longer remembers people he has met and his Witcher skills, memories he should recover over the 60 odd hours of adventuring. The world of The Witcher is an interesting one, mired in Eastern European folklore tinged with some very modern

As good as The Witcher is looking there re a few things we've seen that have raised eyebrows – lip-synching seems to be a rather intermittent thing for some characters so sometimes it's hard to tell who is actually speaking, a problem compounded by the fact that numerous characters seem to go by multiple names. In one of the earliest cutscenes, Geralt is referred to as Geralt and Wolf, sometimes within the same sentence, making for a rather confusing conversation, especially when he's talking to a young spell-caster who goes by two or three names herself. Still, we can't wait to get our hands on review code of the game – it's looking fantastic, plays well and could very well fill the void left in our hearts by the lacklustre Gothic 3. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some better lip-synching and more of the alchemy mechanics in action. That and final review code to convince us this long awaited game is finally going to come out.



These guys are about to get thoroughly Witched

WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2008

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP — Category: **Wrestling** • Players: **1-4** • Developer: **Yuke** • Due: **November**

HYPER BATISTA INTERVIEW

We recently had the chance to chat with this guy about stuff. Here's what he said.

WWE has a massive audience in Australia – what has been your impression of WWE's reception by the Australian public on your tours?

It's amazing...Every time we go there, the fans are great. They are very interactive and really get behind us. To be very honest, the fans in Australia are makeup some of the best crowds that we wrestle in front of. It's quite an experience.

You've been a high profile character in previous versions of the game, what's it like to see yourself immortalized in a videogame?

It doesn't matter how old you are or how serious of a person you are, when you first see yourself as a video game character, it's a cool feeling. I feel like a little kid again.

Do you think that games WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008 can bring wrestling to a wider audience?

Definitely. Even people who aren't avid wrestling fans but are fans of video games can appreciate how realistic the game is and have fun playing.

Are you much of a gamer? If so, what do you like to play?

I'm more "old school" when it comes to video games; I still enjoy playing Pac Man. To be honest, I'm not that good at video games. I don't really have much free time outside of wrestling and the travel to play learn the moves, so I can't refer to myself as a gamer.

How much input do the Superstars have into the creation of your virtual avatar?

That's one of the great things about working in the WWE. They actually encourage you to develop your character. It's harder when other people develop a character for you. The more of your actual self you put into it, the more the fans are going to connect with you.

If you were to create your own character in the WWE SmackDown Vs Raw 2008, what would be your name, signature move and entrance theme?

I'm very proud with my character. I think I have the best pyro in the business and my theme is so energetic, I wouldn't want to change anything.

If I had to, I would probably turn myself into Batman, since he was my favorite superhero growing up; but I would keep the pyro and the entrance music. <<

How many wrestlers does it take to change a lightbulb?

Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP | Category: **FPS** • Players: **1-16** • Developer: **Infinity Ward** • Due: **November 2007**

Just a month ago we got all excited about the single player game of Call of Duty 4, feeling that it was a fine return to form for the franchise, thanks to, in large part, the fact that Infinity Ward are making a welcome return as developers. Now that we're had some hands on time with COD4 multi-player, we can tell you categorically that we're equally excited. Exciting us with a multi-player shooter is a pretty hard thing; not only are most of the FPS games on the market horribly derivative of each other, there's also the simple fact that the majority of them never see the light of day as far as online players go. We don't think this will be the case with Call of Duty 4. The game is beautiful to look at, sounds amazing, has some fantastically designed maps, is easy to pick up and play and has all the tool in place for competition play, ladders and the like.

MULTI-PLAYER HANDS ON

A favourite perk we've played with so far is called Last Stand

CUSTER?

So what is it that is making us so excited about COD4 multi-player? Where to start. As good a place as any would be the character classes available for the player to choose. As is standard in most multi-player FPS these days, players can choose between playing a number of different roles – Demolitions, Heavy Gunner, Assault and the like. These are all pretty familiar but the real fun comes in the ability to create a class. Not only do you choose a weapon and a sidearm, as well as grenades, the create a class option allows players to pick three perks for the class, enabling them to do special thing, such as sprint for longer, have greater penetration for their bullets making them do more damage when fired through a wall (that's right – walls are no longer infallible cover) or do more damage with explosives. Our favourite perk we've played with so far is called Last Stand, a skill that gives the player a few seconds to draw their sidearm and pop off a few shots before dying. Interestingly, the Last Stand perk also seems to give the option to kill yourself, or take the "Coward's Way Out" by holding down the X button (in the 360 version). Although we were not able to actually take that route in the code we played it looks as though players will be able to kill themselves to stop the other team from scoring points off a kill in Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch.

CHALLENGING

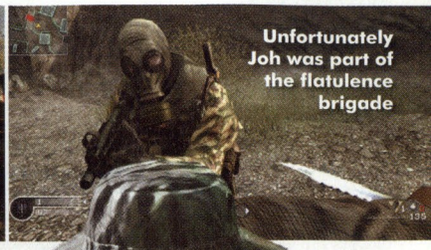
Another really nice feature of the multi-player is the perpetual experience given to players and the challenges players can partake in to unlock new content, perks and weapons. Each class has a list of challenges for the player, such as killing 20 players with a SMG or running a total of 20 miles in game, scoring a certain number of knife kills and the like. Succeeding in these challenges, as well as levelling up the character through numerous games (experience carries across between games) allows players to unlock perks unavailable to less experienced players as well as weapon attachments such as laser sights, silencers and scopes. Never fear though – you will be able to see how experienced another player is so players shouldn't get stuck in games too hard for them.

Bells and whistles aside, the

Sniping - You're doing it wrong

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Final code. It's as simple as that. We want the full game.



Unfortunately Joh was part of the flatulence brigade

Recon by RPG fire

multi-player game is shaping up to be one that should take Xbox Live by storm and actually stay around (unlike the vast majority of other games). Controls are simple to get a handle on, maps deliver a good deal of strategic potential; buildings can be entered and have multiple levels, perfect for sniping or grenade lobbing, other levels offer choke points and defensible positions, so are entirely indoors whilst others take place in the open – while still remaining accessible to newcomers. Our only real hang-up with the game right now is the fact that we had a little trouble differentiating between character models for the two factions but in the code we played the player names (and team colours) didn't always show above the opposing player's heads, so this is a problem that should be eradicated by time of release. <<

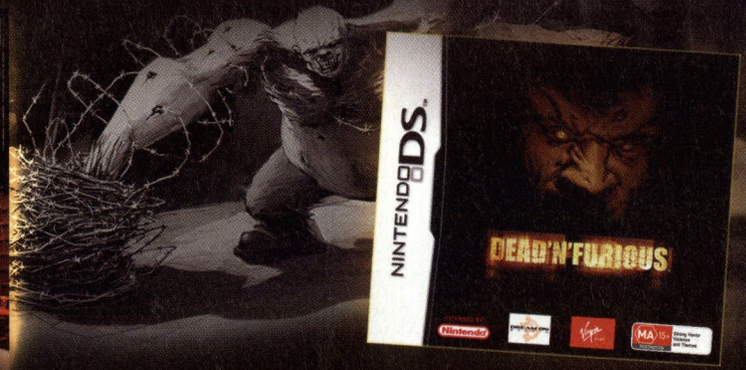
PEW PEW PEW

Killing multiple opponents in a row has benefits other than making you look like a badarse. Kill three opponents without dying and you can see where enemies are on the mini-map. Kill five in a row and you can call in a helicopter gunship to sweep an area with machinegun fire. Kill ten in a row and you can call in an air strike. We don't know if there are other abilities granted with even more kills but we think that if you can kill more than ten people in a row without dying then you really don't really need the extra help.

Hell Unleashed in an Arcade style shooter for Nintendo DS

DEAD & FURIOUS

Defend Yourself



"anyone who has pumped coins into Sega's House of the Dead series will be in heaven with this release." – Nintendolife.com

MA 15+ Strong Horror Violence and Themes RESTRICTED

AFA INTERACTIVE

LICENSED BY Nintendo

NINTENDO DS

DREAM ON STUDIO

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Available from all good retailers : EB GAMES JB HI-FI TOYS R US Gametraders United in play

Rafale

ROLE
Twin-jet combat aircraft capable of carrying out ground and sea attack, air defence and air superiority, reconnaissance, and high-accuracy strike or nuclear strike deterrence

COCKPIT
The cockpit has Hands-On Throttle And Stick control (HOTAS). The cockpit is equipped with a head-up, wide-angle holographic display

ENGINE
The Rafale is powered by two M88-2 engines each providing a thrust of 75kN

WEAPONS
The Rafale can carry payloads of over 9t on 14 hardpoints, including air-to-air missiles such as the MICA, and air-to-ground weapons such as the AASM.

SPECS
Span..... 10.90 m
Wing area: 45.70 m²
Length..... 15.27 m
Height..... 5.34 m
Max speed: M 1.8+/750 kts

F-15E Strike Eagle

ROLE
dual-role fighter plane being able to attack ground targets around the clock and in all weathers with low-altitude and long-range capability

ENGINE
The plane is powered by two Pratt & Whitney F100-PW-220 or 220 engines

SPECS
Length..... 63.8 ft (19.45 m)
Height..... 18.5 ft (5.65 m)
Wing Span... 42.8 ft (13.05 m)
Speed..... Mach 2.5 class

"Though I Fly Through the Valley of Death I Shall Fear No Evil For I am 80,000 feet and Climbing"
— sign over the entrance to the SR-71 operating location on Kadena AB Okinawa.

Tom Clancy's Air Combat Game (Title Pending)

We can't tell you what it's called. We have no idea of the name - we are thinking it will be something like Tom Clancy's Advanced Strikefighter, though probably with a more pronounceable acronym than TCASF – but we couldn't be more excited. Why? Well, the Tom Clancy franchise isn't exactly a lightweight when it comes to quality products and the concept (or what we know of it so far) is intriguing. Set in 2012, the as yet untitled game will revolve around Private Military Firms (PMFs) contracting their mercenary skills out to nation in need of some firepower. It all sounds wonderfully morally ambiguous to us. More information when we get it.

DECONSTRUCTING

The Dark

»DYLAN BURNS

With the release of The Darkness, Starbreeze Studios has firmly cemented itself as the go-to developer when it comes to making a licensed game. Rather than go down the easy path of crap cash-in games with little or no redeeming features (as so often seems to happen with licensed titles these days), Starbreeze has consistently opted to grab proffered IPs firmly by their balls to create games that not only build on each license but also take small liberties with them in order to suite the video game medium. With this in mind, we decided that a game like The Darkness is worth investigating further, worth deconstructing in order to poke at its insides to expose the workings and goings-on that have culminated in such an affective and moving gameplay experience.

We warn you that spoilers will be discussed, so if you haven't played the game then it might be a good idea to do so before reading on. The rest of you, strap yourselves in as we snap on our tight plastic gloves, smear them with antiseptic gel and move on in for a full-body examination of The Darkness. Along for the ride are two individuals heavily involved in the game's creation – Jens Andersson, Lead Designer, and Tommy Tordsson, Additional Writer. Obviously, working for Starbreeze not only requires a deep passion and commitment to making quality games, but also an additional 's' in your surname...

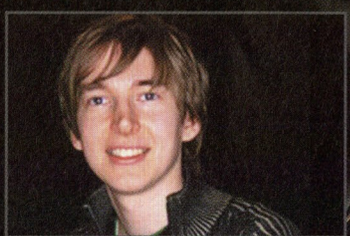
"I'll swap you my gun for the licorice twizzlers"

DESCENT INTO HELL

As soon as we step into Jackie Estacado's shoes we know we're in for a wild ride. Adopted by Uncle Paulie at a tender age and raised as a mafia hitman, Jackie's not exactly typical hero material. At the start of the game Jackie's buddies have just been taken out in a wild car chase and it seems that Uncle Paulie may no longer want Jackie alive and breathing.

Now, if we stop right here and step away from describing the plot for just a minute, and examine the way in which we actually inhabit Jackie's body, several design elements are immediately noticeable. The way that Jackie moves is almost inertial, with a swaying, swaggering feel to it. You can look down and see your body, and if you move to interact with a ladder or some similar object you'll be greeted with a third person camera.

This unique feeling of inhabitancy is an interesting aspect of Starbreeze games, so we asked Jens Andersson to explain the way in which Starbreeze has chosen to present the first person perspective. "It's very much a conscious design choice," replies Andersson. "To us, doing a first person game is a choice to do a game where the player is supposed to feel that he is within the game. This is what we usually mean with immersion; to make the player feel that he is the



Q&A with Tommy Tordsson,

Additional Writer on The Darkness

The Darkness has a very adult script, playing out like an episode of Deadwood in some scenes. In fact, we can't think of another game that so explicitly utters the C-word. Do you think that games need to grow up a little?

Games definitely need to grow up, and not just a little. However, growing up has very little to do with dropping F-bombs and the like. Games will become truly adult when they begin to tackle themes that go much deeper than what we usually explore in games today. And you can do that within epic fantasy stories as well. You don't have to create the game equivalent to "The Seventh Seal" (although I'd like to see that!).

When it comes to the language in The Darkness: Yeah, we used a lot of swearing but, in my opinion, not gratuitously. The heavy use of swear words in Darkness supports the ambience of the world, the state of decay that it's in, and really highlights the corruption that seeps through the cracks everywhere.

ness
SIL
VES
TRI

"Making the characters in the game come alive is always an ongoing process"

person running around within the game-world."

This certainly rings true for both The Darkness and The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay; in many ways the same design aesthetic can be seen throughout both titles. "In Riddick," Andersson continues, "that meant making sure you saw your own body and the shadow of it and in The Darkness we've taken that further where you, for example, have your own body interact with the environment." He is, of course, referring to the Darkness itself and the way in which you inherit its demonic powers.

Something that we rarely stop to think about is what the term 'first person' means. It's a perspective that influences every little thing in a game such as The Darkness. When writing for film or television, the use of perspective can be fluid, changing via camera angles and flashbacks, over many characters, or through the use of effects and other point-of-view techniques. With games the only viewpoint allowed, during play, is that of the player, with the vagaries of individual agency constantly battering at the fourth wall. Tommy Tordsson elaborates. "There are many benefits but also potential traps when you have this sort of improv actor/audience (the player) running around in your play, touching stuff and interacting with other characters. There's always the possibility of the player not noticing important story bits."

"How do we bring the information to the player so that it registers and the player isn't looking into a wall instead? I wouldn't say writing for games and movies are total opposites. There are a lot of similarities. In movies, however, you can switch perspectives at any time. You don't have to write only what the main character sees and can shift in time and space at any time. That's something that we could and would never do in a game like The Darkness. For us, there is only one perspective and that is the player's."

Even demons need a little love

HUBBA BUBBA

This gives us an interesting insight into the difficulties faced by the game's writers. For The Darkness, an essential compromise seems to be reached by designing the game world around two central hubs, Fulton Street and Canal Street Stations, both of which help to create a sense of neighbourhood and, given all your extended family and mafia pals ensconced within them, camaraderie. In many respects, it is the characters that make these game spaces come to life as they shout out your name and offer you side missions or alliances.

"Making the characters in the game come alive is always an ongoing process," says Andersson. "You start off with some concept art and some character designs so you have an idea of who this person is going to be. Choosing an actor for that role is of course one of the most important decisions and with Darkness even more so since we have the VoCap where we record both voice-over along with full body and facial motion capture. It's a great process, and it's always interesting to see how they become more and more individual for each new piece of the puzzle."

Characters can make or break a game, and you know you've played a great game when you remember the individual personalities within it. We asked Andersson what his favourite character-driven moment

Q&A with Tommy Tordsson

Some of the funniest moments come from Jackie's monologues during the game's loading sections. How important were these moments in fleshing out the character?

They're important not just for fleshing out the character, but also for advancing the plot. For example, there's one monologue in which Jackie tells about him growing up in an orphanage together with Jenny. This helps deepen Jackie's character, establishing his orphan background, as well as foreshadow the Orphanage level. I think the loading monologues added a possibility for us to tell the story in a way we could not have otherwise.

"OK team, takea knee"

is in the game. "Personally, I love the shootout scene at Sarah's apartment where the old guard pick up their guns once again." We couldn't agree more. Not only is that scene emotionally-charged and action-packed, but it is a turning point towards the end of the game, where Jackie finds out just who's with him and who's against him. Even Butcher Joyce, who 'never takes sides', cements his alliance with Jackie and provides crucial information regarding Uncle Paulie's end-game location.

IT MUST BE LOVE

Love is a central theme for just about any creative endeavour, and in The Darkness it rears its bittersweet head as Jackie's main impetus, by way of his connection to his girlfriend Jenny. Of course, we're all too familiar with death scenes where a character we're ostensibly meant to care about carks it in the first five minutes, with hardly any emotional connection created for the player. Creating that kind of empathic bond in a game is difficult, and with The Darkness it's done in an interesting way. Your bond to Jenny is established through a first-person moment, and by slowing down the gameplay for this important character-driven vignette.

"The scenes where Jackie spends time with Jenny are important in two ways," explains Andersson, referring mainly to the early scene in the apartment where you cuddle down with Jenny to watch To Kill a Mockingbird. "The first is from a pacing perspective where we want the player to slow down a bit. We believe it's very important to do that since the next time the shooting starts, it gets much more intense."

"The other one is of course that Jenny is so important for the story, and the player needs to spend time with her to feel attached to her. We have worked a lot with player motivation in The Darkness and to properly motivate the player you need him to care. So many games out there don't take that into account and to have story where the player doesn't really care what happens hurts the game."

So in the end love, affection, caring – whatever you want to call it – is the main emotion that Starbreeze want you to feel in that scene. Some games do this woefully, others do marginally better. The Darkness has a pretty good stab at it, and this writer certainly cared more for the character of Jenny than, say, the similarly named female interest in Prey.

We then hit Andersson up with an additional query, seeing as this story of love seems almost incongruent given Jackie Estacado's rather violent history. Does this make Jackie more of a sympathetic character, despite the fact that he's a hardened hitman?

"Yes, very much so. Jackie has a lot of depth. The most interesting part of his personality is that he was raised by his Uncle Paulie and the mafia. That means that his whole family are people in organised crime and he has never really questioned what they are doing. When suddenly his family turns on him his whole world breaks down. And of course, on top of that he gets a visit from an ancient demon."

TAKING THE PISS

Ah yes, the Darkness itself, a symbiotic demon that in many ways represents Jackie's own internal struggle. It's voiced superbly by Mike Patton, and we just had to clear up those rumours that he worked with absolutely no voice filters or effects.

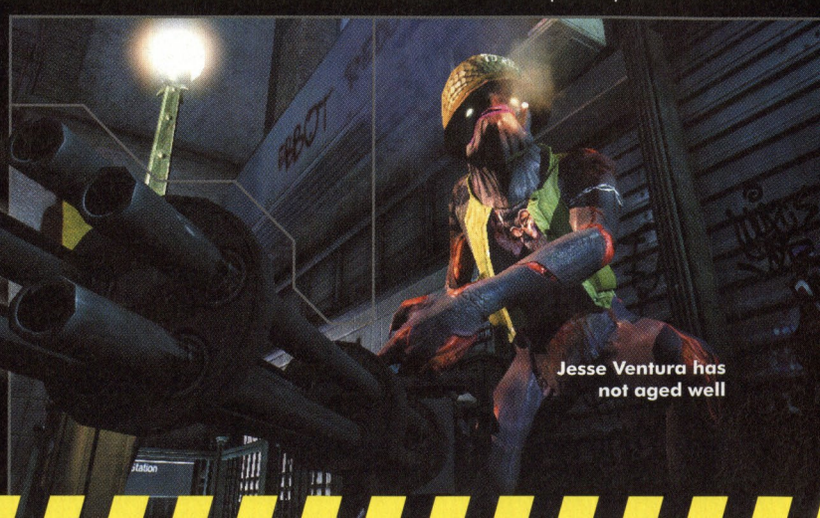
"Yes, he works well, doesn't he?" enthuses Andersson. "We actually did some processing of his voice in the end, but didn't need much at all. Before his voice was recorded, we had no idea how it would work out so it was kinda scary, but it was so worth it."

Was it ever! Patton is the Darkness and it's through the game's use of excellent first-person story telling

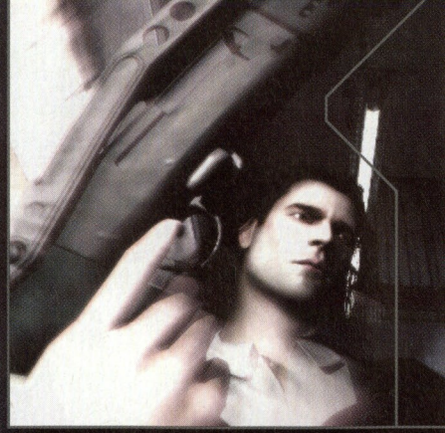
Thems some severe stomach cramps

and gripping scripted moments that we come to share Jackie's frustration at having to utilise this demon, juggling immense power and moral ambiguity. Sure it's easy to wade through enemies like a one-man nuke, but what about the fact that with every life you take the Darkness grows closer to owning your soul?

Attached to the Darkness are the nefarious Darklings, subsets of the Darkness that show the distinct personality traits of this strange demon. In our opinion, the Darklings seemed to play the role of comic relief, especially with their



Jesse Ventura has not aged well



"We've tried to create a game that weaves story-telling with all things interactive."

strong predilection for urinating on corpses. A peek at some of the game's unlockable extras shows musings about the Darklings being used in a more puzzle-oriented way, such as being sent up a food elevator to take out the baddies before you head on up.

"Yes," Andersson admits, "they work very much as the comic relief both in the comics as well as in the game. We went through a lot of iterations on the Darkling mechanics and originally we intended a bigger role for them. They provide a lot of personality to the Darkness though, that gives an extra sense of evil to the game."

Andersson's take is pretty similar to our own. A lot of the action in The Darkness is visceral and interactive (using the Darkness' tentacles or black hole powers) so having the Darklings as more of a nuisance to the enemy, rather than as a main offensive tactic, certainly helps to keep the game moving along.

I'M SO RONERY

We've looked at how the game creates a sense of neighbourhood with its hub design. Another way that it reinforces this is through the use of a few small suburbs or areas within New York, such as Chinatown, Lower East Side and Grinder's Alley. One thing that we noticed about these areas is that they're fairly devoid of life. Except for the requisite gangs of baddies hanging around ready to act as cannon fodder, there aren't that many people just going about their business. We asked Andersson to explain why this is so.

"There are many reasons for why some areas can feel a bit empty. Parts of it are of course due to production issues since there is quite some work that goes into each character that is placed in the city, as we didn't want to have characters that have a lower standard of quality in regards to models, voice etc."

"There are also design aspects, where we didn't want to place civilians in locations where there are fire-fights as that would have a lot of consequences. Still, in some ways I think the desolate feeling works in favour of the game, since it builds into the story where Jackie very much is being alone against the world."

The whole point of the game is Jackie's internal struggle. Filling the city streets with hapless victims may have provided some fun for a while, but in the end Starbreeze are all about creating a character that you care about, as well as providing a strongly linear narrative, with little room for mindless killing sprees... that's what the bad guys are there for.

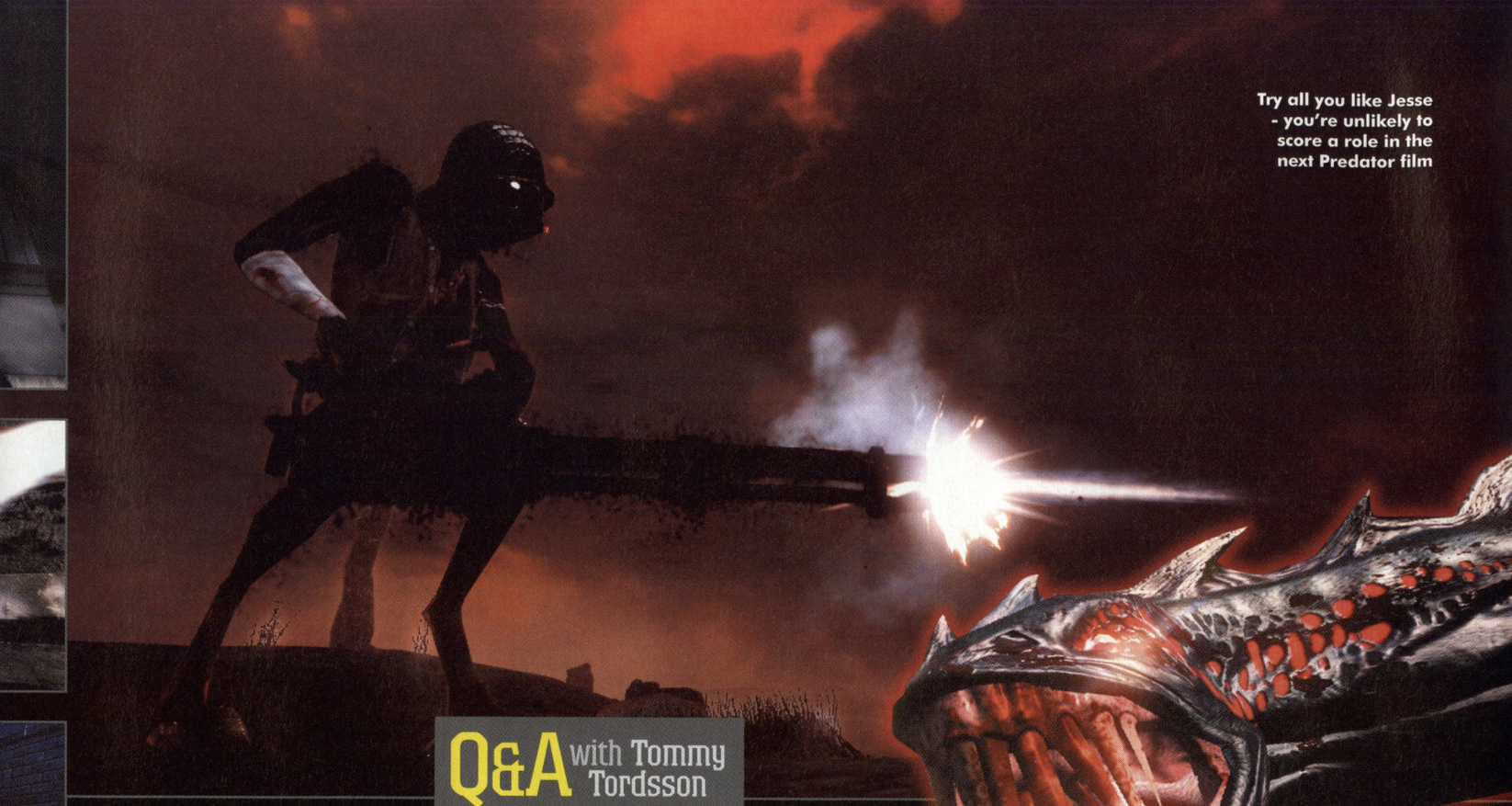
GOING THE DISTANCE...

Go to any mag or online review and one of the main criticisms you'll read of The Darkness is related to its length. If you complete all the side missions and collect all the phone numbers and letters, you're probably looking at around fifteen hours of play time, a fair bit less if

Q&A with Tommy Tordsson

Apart from the actual source material, did any particular television shows, movies or other writers inspire you during the creation of The Darkness?

Obviously, we have a bunch of Sopranos fans here at the office. Personally, I think if I would point to one important source of inspiration for me during this project, beside the comic itself, it would be that TV show.



Try all you like Jesse - you're unlikely to score a role in the next Predator film

you just stick to the story. We've already seen that a lot of work goes into character models and location design, so is it simply a case of quality games sometimes lacking quantity?

"As far as I can tell," Andersson says, when asked if gamers have come to expect too much, "games have actually become a bit shorter the last few years. With the games we like to do, a lot of development time is spent on each specific scenario that we don't want to reuse later on. This gives the game a very specific style that we like, but it also means that the length of a game is very much related to how much time each scenario gets."

It sounds similar to writing a Hollywood script, with a beginning, middle and end. The Darkness, as a linear narrative, cannot hope to have the length shown by any number of open-world games, where their length is tied to how many hours the player can have fun juggling bodies in the air with rocket launchers. However, there are some linear games that have impressed on the length front. Resident Evil 4 is an excellent example of a long game that is heavily linear. The point needs to be made, though, that a lot of RE4's length comes from waves of enemies and a fair bit of location repetition, whereas in The Darkness it's the story that is more important than the combat.

WHERE'S THE CHALLENGE?

A second criticism made of The Darkness is its difficulty, or lack of it. It must be said that even on the hardest difficulty setting the game is still quite easy to complete, and this is directly related to the fact that Jackie is pretty much unstoppable whenever he lets the Darkness take over. Andersson is quick to admit this. "I've realised how different people perceive difficulty and challenge in games after hearing their experience with The Darkness. We've tried very much to create a game that weaves story-telling with all things interactive."

The only problem we see with this is, as we've mentioned, that Jackie is just too darn powerful, so is this the experience that Starbreeze wanted the player to have? "While it strengthens the story-telling of the game to have the player grow powerful in a game where the powers are not clearly a positive thing, it may be that people that are into more FPS action may feel it lacking in challenge towards those parts of the game."

Q&A with Tommy Tordsson

A game such as The Darkness is sure to set afire many writers' hopes of one day creating a cool game. What advice do you give these budding game writers?

I can't say I have a clear answer to this. One way of looking at it is that no matter how good the writing, if it can't be turned into something playable, then what's the use? Writers need to learn the restrictions and potential of the medium. At the same time, if the writing's no good, then you might as well have no story at all and just go for the kick-ass gameplay.

What we here at Starbreeze do is to have a lead writer always present from the start of the production in order to really integrate both gameplay and story and also to be able to solve problems that inevitably will show up when dealing with the volatile nature of game development.

While Andersson didn't quite give us the answer we were after, we can probably assume that he is cognisant of the problem. There's also a subtext within his answer, which points to the opinion that the game is about more than just its difficulty. After all, if you were to magically acquire a demon and go on a rampage killing your mafia family, you probably wouldn't find it all that hard either – so in some ways the game is realistic. It is true, however, that at times The Darkness fails to provide the kind of difficulty that we're used to in first person shooters.

ALL DECONSTRUCTED OUT

So what, if anything, can we conclude after this investigation into The Darkness? First of all, it should be clear that making games is no easy feat, particularly if you have a passion and dedication to making good games, as Starbreeze certainly does.

A second nugget of knowledge gained is that these guys really do think about your reaction to their game, they are aware of its faults and are happy to explain why certain things are the way(s) that they are. Normally we just play a game, put it aside and then forget about it, so we hope you agree that a fair few interesting tidbits can be pried from developers' heads, given the right questions.

Of course, some games just aren't worth the effort to pursue, but every so often one comes along that really affects you, and for many people The Darkness certainly fits that description. So until the next game worthy of a deeper look comes along, pull out that copy of The Darkness and replay it with everything discovered here in mind – or just leave it all at the door and enjoy the experience once again. Either way, it's a bloody good game! <<

TRON has certainly taken on a more adult edge

SUPER BATTLE OPERA

» BRYCE McDONOUGH

To the uninitiated, the idea of flying half-way around the world for a videogames tournament you are quite certain you have zero chance of success in may seem like somewhat of an exercise in futility. But this is no piss-weak backyard tournament, and we are not ordinary gamers. This is Tougeki, also known in English as Super Battle Opera, and we are fighting game fans, representing our country.

Tougeki translates literally to 'Fight Drama/Opera', and has grown exponentially from its inception in 2003. SBO takes place annually in Japan, and is now established as Japan's premiere national fighting games tournament. The competition is organised and run by the arcade games magazine Arcadia and now in its' fifth year has taken on a very international look.

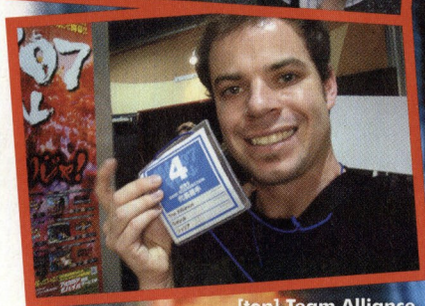
Our hotel was a little dodgier than we had hoped with a TV that predated digital watches

The tournament itself is a celebration of fighting games, with a policy of 'latest and greatest' except for a few very special exceptions. The concept is really quite simple — qualifying tournaments are held at a number of arcades around Japan (and this year, overseas as well) with the winners of these prelim tournaments taking a spot in the finals held in Tokyo. Previously the finals have been in May, however this year to allow more time to coordinate the huge increase in foreign participants, it was moved to August.

Australia were not the only international contingent invited this year, in fact there were 8 international teams in Tekken — out of a bracket of 32. The established contenders were naturally the Koreans — with 2 teams this year making the trip. One of the teams, modestly named 'Team Korea' was essentially their all-star team, made up of the 3 biggest Korean names. Nin (Steve), who won SBO in 2005 (singles) is still regarded as one of the best players in the world. Qudans (Devil Jin) is another who every player in the world knows by name, and for long periods has been regarded the best in the world. And thirdly 200 Won (Anna) who was suddenly the player everyone was talking about after he beat 3 of Japan's finest in a 5-on-5 tournament in January this year, to give them the victory. One of the favourites for the title. The 2nd Korean team carried the name 'Team Earth', and with characters of Roger Jr, Jack-5 and Lee, were on a mission to prove less popular characters could still be successful. Europe's team was aided by one of Japan's best players who is currently studying English in London. USA were allowed 3 teams — east coast, west coast and south. Shanghai sent a Mainland team, who rocked up at the arcade a couple of days early and were quite impressive, though we didn't know a whole lot about them.

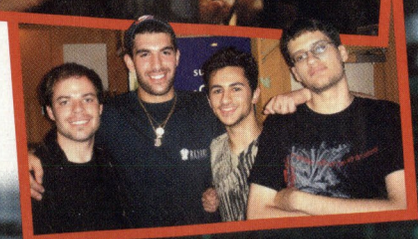
So it was that myself, Crimson and Andrew, known collectively as 'The Alliance' found ourselves shopping for cheap flights and cheaper hotels as Australia's representatives at the world's most prestigious Tekken tournament to date. So we found ourselves hopping off a plane into stifling humidity — even at 10pm — almost a week before the tourney.

Our hotel was a little dodgier than we had hoped with a TV that predated digital watches, and 3 beds tucked into a room I would have previously argued would have struggled to fit one. Still, the PS3 worked, internet, almost effective aircon, and all we needed was a bed each anyways. So that night we found ourselves wandering the backstreets of Shinjuku looking for an arcade packed with good »



[top] Team Alliance. Left to right: Saiyuk, Crimson and Andrew [above] Bryce gets his ticket to ride

[below] Team Korea and Team Alliance [bottom] With members of Team USA



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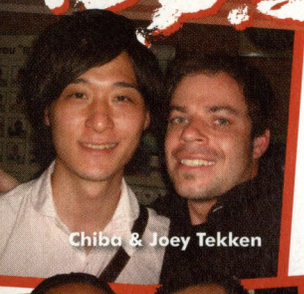
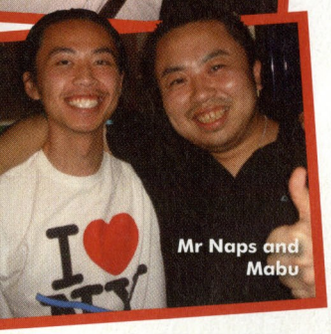

Chiba & Joey Tekken


Mr Naps and Mabu

players. There are arcades literally on every street – but it means nothing without some comp. A freak of luck and we found this tiny hole-in-the-ground arcade which we realised later was Joybox – THE arcade in Tokyo. We popped in, found some players on some of the 6 machines there with decent ranks on their cards, and sat down to a few games. We got talking with them – turns out about 5 or 6 of them were also taking part in SBO! We made friends quickly, played Tekken for a few hours and then decided to all go out and eat together. Talk about score!!! Next couple of days were the same thing – go out, do stuff during the morning/afternoon, and try to hook up at Joybox in the evening for some games.

The morning of the tournament it was, unsurprisingly, HOT. Shorts and T-shirts seemed terribly overdressed, and wandering across the road to the convenience store for some brekky was more than enough to break a sweat. We had made arrangements to hook up with some of our new friends at Joybox arcade, and then all go together to the tournament location as we had heard it was no simple feat finding the place. Despite doing our best to crash fairly early the night before, we were still feeling a bit tired in the morning and I for one am very glad that the Tekken tournament was the final fixture for Saturday – I don't know how the Soul Calibur and VF players did it.

It was time for the toss – or rather 'Scissors Paper Rock' as is customary in Japan.

TEKKEN ON ALL CHALLENGERS

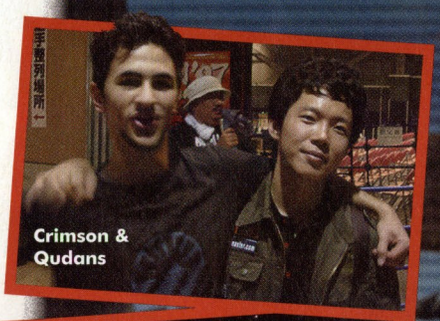
The tournament was held at Differ Ariake – a smallish run-down wrestling arena. It felt good to finally be there, about 6 months after forming our team and deciding to go for it, 3 months after we qualified for it, and 5 days after realising we needed to do something amazing if we wanted to do well in this tourney. The brackets were now known, and out of all the non-Korean international teams, we got the hardest match-up – a mere case of Osaka's #2 team. When we got to the venue, we presented our official license cards and wandered on in. The air in the foyer was orange and slightly stale with cigarette smoke, but filled with an incredible air of expectancy – it was like everyone in there wanted to jump up and down with excitement like a 6-year old, but knew they had to act at least somewhat like adults. The arena was already spewing out noises, as the brackets for Virtua Fighter 5 were running at the time. Not really knowing what to do, I really felt for all the other foreign contestants, as most of them spoke none or almost no Japanese and so sat around waiting. We met up with a few Aussies who were in the crowd to cheer us on, and found a couple of other guys we knew as well. This really helped us stay on top of our nerves, as the enormity of the event was starting to really dawn. When the marshalling finally started for the tournament, we were placed in entrant order next to the side doors and matched up against our opposition. It was time for the toss – or rather 'Scissors Paper Rock' as is customary in Japan. I lost this, which meant that the opposition got to either choose 1P or 2P side, or could choose to know who our first player was going to be. They also get to choose the first stage regardless. They chose to know our first player (me) and we decided we would take the 2P side. Then came more waiting. Our opposition were right there next to us, but we didn't particularly want to engage them in conversation. Behind us were Team Korea, so Andrew (being Korean) chatted a bit to them – cool guys – and we even took a photo together. Eventually we walked in to the darkened auditorium, and despite the fact there were 96 people competing, and only about the same again watching, we felt like pro-wrestlers taking our places at the 4 machines around the main stage. Huge screens above the main stage took direct feed of games taking place, interviews going on of players, commentary from a rather feminine guy with ridiculously fast lips, or comments from 'the desk'. The atmosphere was seriously crazy.

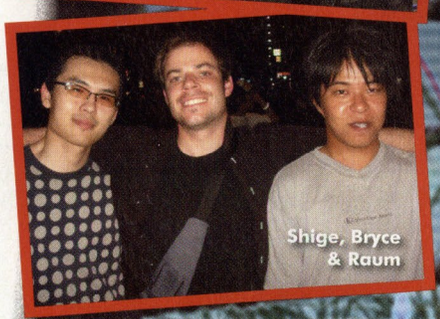
The pool games were all played on these 4 machines, and only the final 4 (played after final 4 for SC3 and VF5) would be up on the big stage. After more waiting, and mass amounts of screaming and yelling, cheering and laughing, eventually our time came. We were taken to our machine, and sat down. I was up first, and a guy came over and explained to me to wait until "FIGHT!!!" and press the start button immediately afterwards. Turns out our opposition being one of the favourites in the tourney, we were going to be streamed to the big screens with live commentary. Talk about pressure!!

It all kind of blurs up from this point on. I knew I had to do really well in order to take a match, which meant total focus. The commentator was going nuts during the match, but I heard none of it. My boys were sitting behind me, giving me support and trying to lift me, but I barely felt or heard any of it. And about 2 minutes later, it's over. Their Hei player was just too good for me – I had strung a few

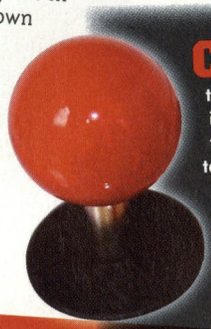
Team Alliance & Team Earth (Korea)

Lee Mario & Crimson


Crimson & Qudans


Shige, Bryce & Raum

CONTROLS may not seem like a huge deal at first thought, but the debate of different sticks and control pads is one that has dominated fighting game tournaments for a long time, particularly in the western world. USA tekken machines come with control ports for you to plug in your PS2 pads/sticks, and many of their best players take advantage of this. The Korean stick is hugely different in feather-touch and feel to the Japanese standard stick, whilst in Australia we either have our own style, or the Japanese style. In this particular tourney, we made the rules at our qualifiers that only sticks could be used, and they had to be Japanese style. Even then, Andrew in particular struggled for several days to get his touch down, and meant he could never truly perform to his maximum potential. The Koreans were actually given a machine with a Korean stick on their side to compete with, in an effort to let everyone play at their best.



IN MAY this year, thanks in no small part to the huge efforts from our Street Fighter community based at ozhadou.net, we held the qualifying tournaments for SF3:3S, VF5, and Tk5:DR in Sydney. Attendance was quite impressive, with over 100 people contesting across the 3 games, despite our small (but strong) VF community. Teams from Melbourne and Brisbane attended, with a Melbourne team taking the SF3 spot. Needless to say, it was a Sydney team which took the Tekken spot :)

good things together, taken a round, but been beaten. Now all I could do was move to the side, let Andrew take over, and hope the guys could beat them for me so I could have another go in the second round. Andrew played well, but the Hei guy was again too strong. Despite a few very close rounds, Andrew lost 3-1 as well, and next thing you know it, it's our last man vs their first. Crimson stepped up and did everything he could, but we had stumbled, and fallen, at the first hurdle. Without even beating their first guy, we were knocked out of the tournament, and were now reduced to spectator status for the rest of the day. Crimson just sat there, staring at the stick, wishing he could chuck in another dollar and take another crack at the guy, but it was over and we were out.

Now we didn't have to focus on our own match anymore, we got to get into the spirit of the tourney, and it didn't take long for us to realise that the experience itself, whilst short, was enough to feel special for a long time yet. We caught up on the foreign teams.

Unsurprisingly, the Korean teams were doing well — Team Korea had not even needed their 3rd player yet, and were well on track to final four. The other Korean team were tearing it up, knocking out the previous year's champions in the process. The 3 USA teams and the Chinese team had all followed similar fates to ourselves — only one of them managing to even win a single game, and that was a 5-round nailbiter. The Euro team managed to win their first round, but not before both London players were beaten straight up, and Tissuemon (from Osaka, studying in London now) one-manned them through to the second round. Same thing happened in the second round...except Tissuemon

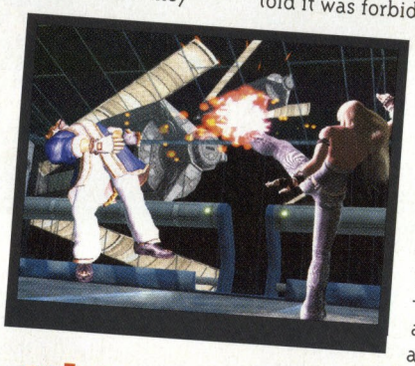
Taizo & Matador am win!

闘劇'07

Matador

WORLD'S BEST? Matador on 2 occasions came in as last man and beat 2 of the opposition. After the tourney we hung out in Osaka for a few days, and I chatted to pretty much all the guys down there – turns out he's a really cool guy as well. Whether he is actually the world's best Tekken player or not is up for debate, but his control of nerves, personal character knowledge and reputation which he has carried for a few years now definitely earmark him as Japan's finest, and showed once again that whilst Tokyo might have the edge in SF and VF, Osaka fields the best Tekken players in the country.

lost as well and they were out. The Japanese favourites – 'Chanjia for two' from Osaka had unsurprisingly breezed through so far. Their team of Mainstreet Ryu Jr (Hei), Taizo (Feng) and Matador (Ganryu) were undoubtedly the biggest who's-who of Japanese players, and they showed why. The guys who knocked us out fell at the next hurdle themselves, which was a little disappointing. The final four eventually being made up of 'Chanjia for two' (Osaka), 'Team Korea' (Korea), 'Team Earth' (Korea) and 'Team Soyondori' (Nagoya). The Nagoya team had 2 very well known Japanese players on their team, however their top batter was actually Soyondori, a Korean guy who had moved across just a few months earlier. In the Nagoya qualifiers, he won 18 games in a row and neither of his teammates even played a game in qualifying, so much was expected of him. He didn't disappoint – their 3rd player Raum (Anna) had not played a single match yet, all the way to final four. Soyondori made quick work of Team Earth, and Team Osaka knocked Team Korea out to huge roars as they were definitely the favourites with the crowd. The finals then were a (nearly) all-Japan affair, and being part of the crowd as we cheered them on was fantastic. Oh, and the Tekken was UNBELIEVABLE. In the grand final, Osaka's last man was left needing to beat the remaining 2 Japanese players (their top man beat Soyondori... finally) and despite being down to a sliver of life 2-1 rounds down, in BOTH matches, prevailed and showed why he is considered possibly Japan's best player. He was hardly modest about the whole thing, but when you win a national tourney, I'm pretty sure you get to carry some bragging rights with it. In the presentation ceremony, I finally gathered the courage and wits to take some clandestine photos (I was told it was forbidden earlier), we watched them receive the relatively small $1000 prize purse, and spent the rest of the night chatting about some of the most tense and exciting Tekken we had ever seen.



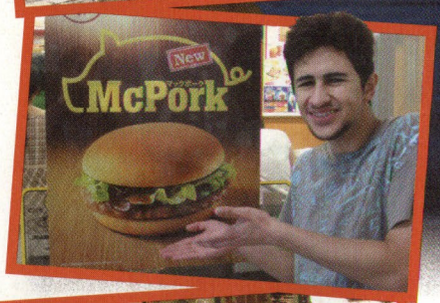
when you win a national tourney, I'm pretty sure you get to carry some bragging rights with it

TEKKEN IT HOME

The tourney over, it was all about the casuals – that night we headed to a lock-in at Joybox – midnight to 6am for 1000 yen and all the games you can manage against some seriously top players. I did pretty well in all casuals, but Andrew was up for a break and didn't play much, and Crimson was near burn-out level on Tekken, preferring to watch for a while, and then sleep.

And just like that, it was all over. A few more days in Tokyo, said bye to all the great guys we met up with there (and invited some to hit us up at our own national tourney). A couple of days down in Osaka, said bye again to all my old friends and our new ones. And back to Australia. Over. We might not have really stood a chance this year, but we definitely showed them we knew what we were doing, even if in the tourney we lost out. We made friends with so many of the guys, and experienced Tekken at a level and intensity that, quite simply, will never exist in Australia. I had said this would be my farewell to competitive Tekken, but after it all, I can only think about what I am going to have to do in order to qualify again next year. <<

Crimson's adventures in Akiba. From top to bottom: creepy, porky and cute.



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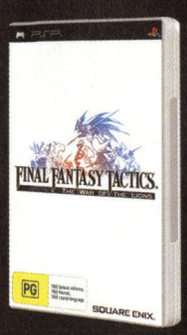

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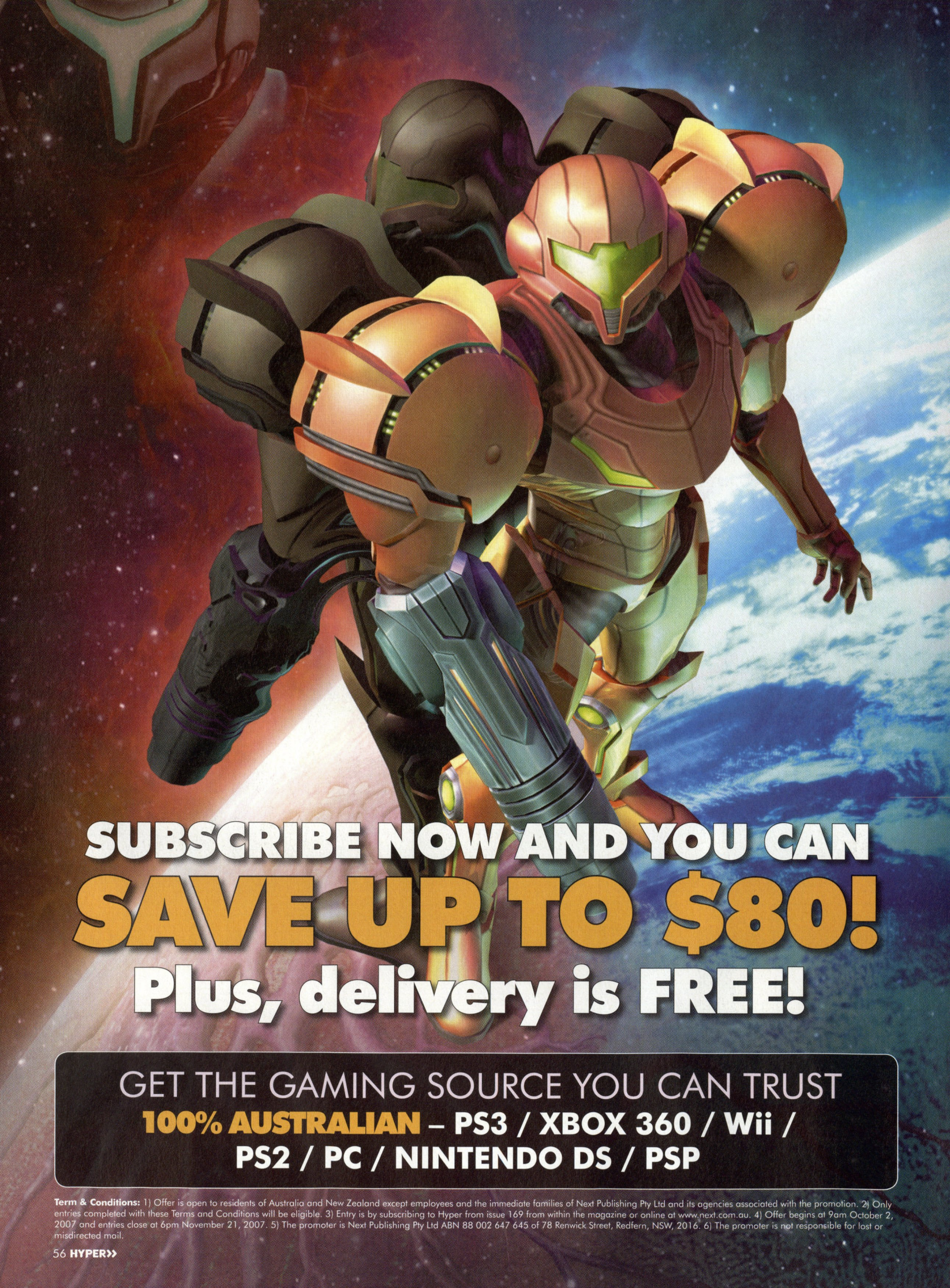

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WAR GAMES

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

Difficulty Is A Good Thing

As regular readers of this column will know, War Games is all about the things that people say. This month, and indeed, in many months previous, there has been one topic that has frequently been on the lips of game developers and publishers alike, and that is exactly how hard it is to get a game up and running on Sony's PlayStation 3.

We've heard Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi say that the "machine's architecture is tricky", giving us some idea why he opted to developer Blue Dragon exclusively for the Xbox 360. Meanwhile, Electronic Arts were incapable of getting their first-wave PS3 releases to run at the same framerate as the Xbox 360 versions, with game like Madden 2008 crawling along at 30 frames per second, while the X360 version doubled that.

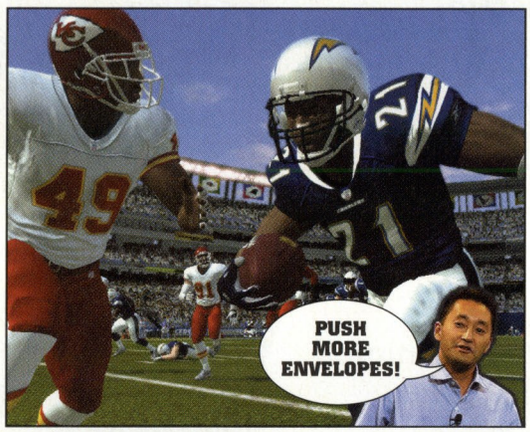
Not all developers think the same way, of course, with many contending that the PS3 isn't difficult at all, and that it just takes more time and effort to learn its intricacies. In particular Yosuke Hayashi, the director of the PS3's Ninja Gaiden Sigma, spoke out about the reported difficulties, saying that anyone who complained about programming for the PS3 was just making excuses for their lack of results.

Whatever the truth of the situation, it seems that Kazuo "Kaz" Hirai, the President and Group CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment is convinced that the PlayStation 3's complexity (whether it be perceived or actual) is a good thing, both for developers, and for gamers.

"If you look back at the commentary we received when we launched PS2, there was a lot of talk to the effect that 'It's very difficult to program for' and 'It's easier on a Dreamcast'." Said Hirai, speaking to the USA's Official PS3 magazine.

"It's happened before," continued Hirai. "If [game developers] came back and told me, 'PS3? We can do this in a heartbeat,' that would be worrying because what it is telling me is that we're not pushing the envelope from a technology standpoint."

Hirai does of course have one good point, and that is that Sony have been labelled as difficult in the past. However, the argument that "harder is better" is not entirely credible.



In the PlayStation 2's case, its developmental complexity when compared to the likes of the Dreamcast, Xbox and Gamecube was much less of a concern because Sony had that all-important market share. Simply put, if you're a third-party developer and you want your game to sell enough copies to make back your investment, it makes great business sense to develop for the console with the greatest installed user base, even when that console takes more effort, and more late nights, to attain a the same level of quality.

The PlayStation 3, however, is not in a position of dominance, and if it's ever going to match the sales of the Xbox 360 and Wii, then it's going to take great games. The catch 22 situation that Sony finds themselves in is that without the greatest installed users, are developers going to endure the extra effort required to build great PS3 games?

Kaz Hirai is betting that they will, closing out his interview with a look to the future.

"The power that we've packed into PS3 will really manifest itself in software titles that come up four, five or six years down the line."

Lets hope that it happens sooner than that, both for the game developers, and for PlayStation 3 owners.

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

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Tic-Tac	Ollie	Kick Flip	Front Side 180 Flip	360 Flip	Anything by Rodney Mullen

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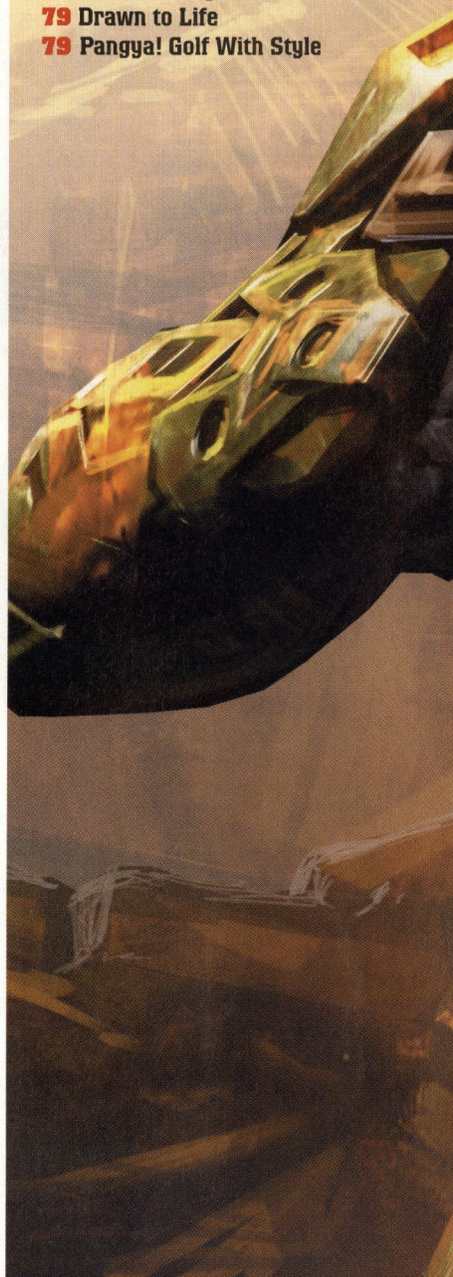


X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Halo 3

ELIOT FISH has a spare suit of Spartan armour in his wardrobe...

category: **FPS**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Bungie**
publisher: **Microsoft**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Now that Halo 3 has been unleashed upon the planet, every tiny detail about the game has probably been dissected in a variety of online forums. But we at Hyper believe it pays to preserve the experience of that first play through, so this review is going to be a spoiler-free zone. If you're reading this, then chances are you're yet to play the game, and we're not here to steal Bungie's thunder by revealing that Master Chief is actually a woman.

Okay, so Halo 3 doesn't contain any M. Night Shyamalan-style shocks, but the little details in the game still deserve to be served up fresh, especially for the fans who appreciate (and actually understand) the intertwined saga of the Covenant, the Forerunners, the Prophets, the Elites, the Halos, the Flood and the Spartans. Now, read on to see why it's worth slipping on that funky green helmet one more time.

BUNGIE BOUNCES BACK

Straight up, the world of Halo now looks great in high definition. The Chief's well-worn armour, the metallic shine on the vehicles, and all the new visual tricks (motion blurring, depth of field, real-time reflections and global lighting) all help to make this game stunning to look at. But to be honest, it's also a mixed bag. Human characters look pretty dreadful up close, with an odd saggy appearance and weak facial animation marring the otherwise decent models. The problem is that the characters still look puppet-like, making it hard to feel any real emotion for them.

As far as textures go, again there's a strange mixture of the wonderful and the bland. Some surfaces look dull and blurry, whilst others have crisp details. Halo was never a game to be examined up close and that sadly hasn't really changed on the 360.

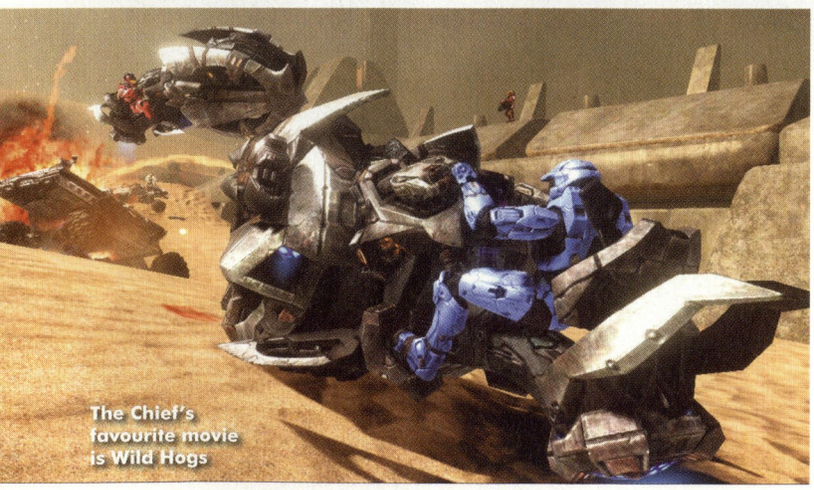
However, when the game is in motion, you'll find little to complain about. The vehicle models are superb and many of your opponents - mostly the heavily armoured Brutes and the fleshy mutations of the Flood - are fantastic. Halo 3 certainly uses colour more stridently than any of the previous games, so that washed-out look is finally long gone. But when you consider that Call of Duty 4 can look as amazing as it does and still run at 60 frames per second, we can't help but wonder if Bungie could have worked a little harder to really squeeze some more juice out of the 360.

To quickly address the audio before we get on to more important matters: Halo's music has always been good (widdly guitar solos aside) and there are some particularly nice moody pieces in some of the levels that linger between electronica and lush orchestrations. Of course, that annoying "action" theme is back again, so be prepared to hear the same old tunes kick in.

The voice acting is as good as it's ever been, and it must be said that the incidental chatter from your enemies is funnier than ever, from Brutes demanding there be "no inappropriate touching" during combat to the way Grunts howl all sorts of humorous battle insults.

MASTERING THE CHIEF

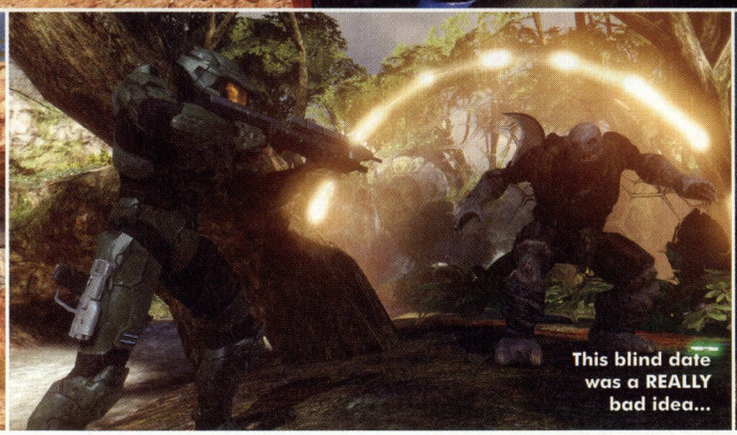
As far as the gun blasting mayhem goes, Halo 3 is another confident display of the tried and true formula that Bungie hit upon with the very first game. The pacing of the game is excellent, with some awesome set-piece battles that will really get the blood flowing. Taking down a gigantic Scarab on foot is particularly memorable, with Chief needing to cripple it to the



The Chief's favourite movie is Wild Hogs

[above] Sydney's APEC 3007 protests turn ugly.

Halo isn't done. There's still Halo Wars and that weird Peter Jackson project to come...



This blind date was a REALLY bad idea...

point where it collapses temporarily so you can hop up on board and destroy its internal energy core. When you come face to face with two Scarabs at once - well, that's when you need to get creative.

Halo 3 has all the old favourites: the Warthog, Scorpion tank, Ghost, Banshee, Wraith and so on, but it also introduces a few new vehicles that will quickly steal your heart. There's the Chopper, a fast Covenant motorbike with great stability that carries a mounted laser gun; the Mongoose, which can carry two people and yet has the speed of a small buggy or dirt bike; and the Hornet, a new UNSC flying vehicle that'll get you dogfighting and pestering ground targets. All handle brilliantly and add even more depth to the vehicular carnage.

Some battles in Halo 3 are on a scale large enough to involve a number of Scorpions, Warthogs, Ghosts, Banshees, Hornets and Choppers all at the same time. It's this kind of sandbox-style combat that Halo 3 excels at, especially considering that the majority of the game is spent outdoors.

Whilst Halo 2 was guilty of recycling architecture in its end game, Halo 3 finally feels entirely organic and believably constructed. There's a UNSC base with a dirty, industrial feel; a Flood infected starship with fleshy walls of slimy, oozing postules; a shattered highway that's perfecting for hooning on the Chopper; and a number of typical, beach-side locations ripe for mayhem. The scale of most of Halo 3's locations and battles is bigger than ever before, so don't expect many corridor crawls - this sequel is all about topping everything that's gone before.

» Halo 3 is another confident display of the tried and true formula that Bungie hit upon with the very first game...

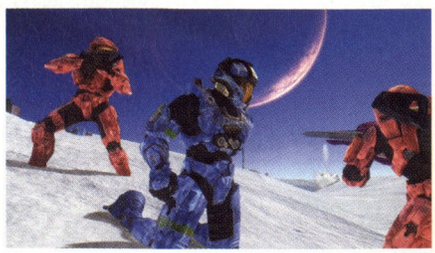
Spartans don't take kindly to their suits being called "fruity"

COATED IN BURNING LOVE

Though Halo's combat is supremely balanced, Bungie has decided to throw in items called 'equipment': a portable gravity lift, bubble shield, trip mines, a grenade-like power drain, a personal auto-turret, a blinding flare and more. It takes a while to get used to the fact that you can now employ these with the X button, but they add more depth to the action instead of interfering with it.

On one occasion, we were much relieved to find a portable gravity lift lying around, giving us an instant escape route to an overhead walkway where we could get a breather from the eight Brutes blocking the hallway below. There are also tasty Napalm-like grenades that let you coat the enemy in burning love. Mmmmm.

New weapons also beef up your arsenal. We particularly like the ridiculous punch of the Gravity Hammer, which is the perfect melee weapon against those bigger, tougher enemies. Get hit by one and you won't soon forget it - Chief certainly cops some remarkable deaths in Halo 3, getting launched through the air and into the abyss on a number of occasions by a Hammer swinging Brute. The deadly Spartan Laser has that ultra-satisfying instant kill, but you need to keep the weapon trained on your target long enough for the shot to charge up.



Then there's the way you can now wrench a fixed turret off its tripod for an instant portable heavy weapon. Chief holsters his two other weapons when carrying a turret, so it always pays to grab one if you see it sitting there begging to be used, though it does slow your movement speed to a vulnerable stagger.

With the Brutes being the predominant foe this time around, you'll also be able to get your hands on the new Brute pistol called the Mauler. Somewhere between a pistol and shotgun, you can dual wield the Mauler for a nice spread of pain, but we found it ineffective. The Spiker is another new pistol with a very high rate of fire, making it far more appealing than the standard marine pistol.

WHAM BAM THANK YOU CAM

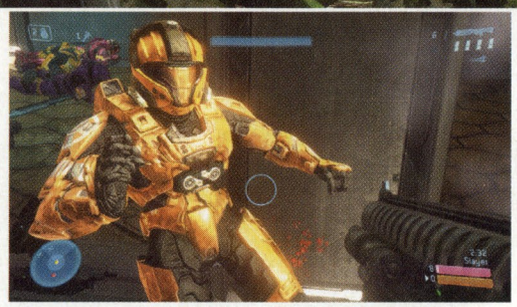
Destined to be one of Halo 3's most popular features is its Forge mode. Forge allows you to edit any of the multiplayer maps in the game on the fly. What is most remarkable is that you can "play" the Forge mode with friends for what is essentially a multiplayer map editing session. You can run and gun around the map as you would normally, but by pressing up on the D-Pad, you transform into a small robotic orb. In this form, you can spawn any of the games weapons, vehicles, flag/player spawn points, miscellaneous objects and so on, with all the items having a cost that is deducted from a global map budget. Fill a level with rocket launchers and Scorpion Tanks and a giant wall of crates - whatever your twisted imagination can come up with. No doubt YouTube is going to be flooded with tonnes of kooky videos. What's cool is that the Forge will encourage all sorts of inventive new multiplayer game types.

So, multiplayer... Really, everyone is going to play this game on Xbox Live until their eyes bleed. The new Spartan armour variants and female voice option makes player customisation much more flexible. You can mix and match different helmets with chest plates and limb pieces, colour everything and add your own custom logos, so teams will really be able to get their own funky look going.

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Most importantly, Halo 3 boasts a mind-boggling list of highly configurable game types and some sweet new maps.

We particularly like Sandtrap, which is basically a big bowl of sand for a real arena battle feel; the tight paranoia of Guardian, which can quickly become a grenade spam-fest; and the epic nature of Valhalla, with its huge bases on either side of the map. To finish off, you can hop into a game of four-player co-op and thrash the campaign.



"Don't shoot! I spent a fortune having this suit gold-plated!"

CROWN JEWELS, THE THIRD

It's pretty obvious that Halo 3 wasn't going to disappoint. Bungie has worked hard to ensure this game is the crowning jewel in their beloved sci-fi series, so all the polish, features and cool set-pieces battles that you would expect are all intact. What some people will argue is that Halo 3 is just more of the same - a fine-tuned evolution of the previous two games, without any game-changing new mechanics, universe-shattering plot twists or truly jaw-dropping next-gen graphics. But with such fantastic, well-balanced shooter play, an evolution instead of a revolution is fine by us. Halo 3 is the best of the bunch and a must-have for your 360 collection. <<

ADMIRING YOUR HANDIWORK Halo 3 automatically 'records' the action as you play, allowing you to switch to a Theatre mode and review your last half hour or so of gaming. You can pause, rewind or watch the action in slow motion, as well as free-fly about the level, or switch your camera view to any of the combatants. Freezing the gameplay and then moving the camera to inspect the frozen action from any angle is damn cool.

This feature is also handy for devising tactics - just pause and fly through the level to see where snipers are located or why you find certain bottlenecks particularly tough going. If you see something amazing, you can save a clip of it and share it with your friends.

Gorgeous set-piece battles, amazing multiplayer, options galore.	Same old Halo, graphics are a mixed bag, ho-hum story.	HYPER VERDICT

Guaranteed to dazzle and delight. Chief is back!

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
90	89	94	93

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

World in Conflict

The Reds aren't under your bed, **ANTHONY FORDHAM** is

category: **RTS**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Massive**
publisher: **Sierra**
price: **$89.95** / rating: **M** / available: **Now**

Do you know what a hex grid is but really wish you didn't? Do you have a nutso friend or crazy uncle who drags you along to gaming conventions; the kind of conventions where there are no computers or consoles in sight and all the gaming is done on intricate maps with little pieces of cardboard?

Then we feel your pain. Even more so if you're actually into hardcore military simulations featuring tanks, divisions, fire support and area domination.

Until the rise of the PC as a gaming powerhouse, mil sims were limited to the afore mentioned and oft reviled hex grid. Guys who love numbers drool over these turn-based games but the rest of us are left out in the cold.

No more, thanks to developer Massive, which has already proven its ability with the excellent - if a little sterile - Ground Control series.

World in Conflict takes the gameplay model pioneered in Ground Control and brings it home. In fact, this is almost the opposite of a far-future SF strategy romp, in that it's actually set in the past.

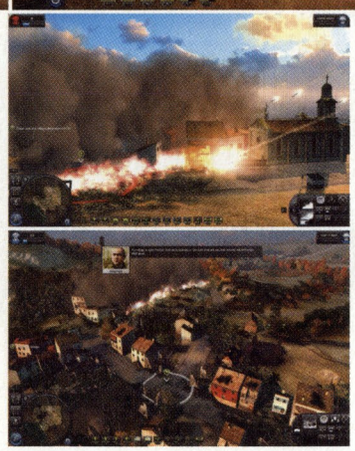
THAT OTHER PAST

But not any past you or I know. Instead, WIC takes place in an alternate 1989 where the Soviet Union, far from being crushed under the drunken tank treads of Boris Yeltsin, instead says, "screw this" and invades the US.

Do we even need to mention films like Red Dawn? Yes, because while those exercises in Cold War paranoia focused on tight bands of guerrillas fighting against the massive Soviet machine, WIC is rather more immediate.

You're right there, on the ground, in the middle of Seattle as Soviet troops sneak into the city via civilian cargo ships. It's a loud, disorientating, confusing mess, just like real combat. You know where your unit is, you know your immediate objective, but a sense of the greater battle, there is almost none.

What WIC does so well is give you the sense of being in a real war. Speak to veterans and they sneer at the "all knowing" nature of most game war heroes. The truth of war is that you're given a job to do, you generally have no idea exactly why you're doing it, and everything else is smoke and fire.



[above] Conflict - presumably in the world somewhere

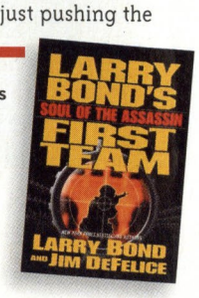
With this kind of experience it's easy to forget that WIC is, at its heart, a fairly straightforward RTS. There's no base building or resource collecting, you just get a bunch of units that you use to kill other units.

WASDWTF?

But Massive's decision to use a sort of semi-FPS control method - with WASD moving the camera - and unit and environment detail levels that allow you to zoom right down to the street means WIC is incredibly immersive.

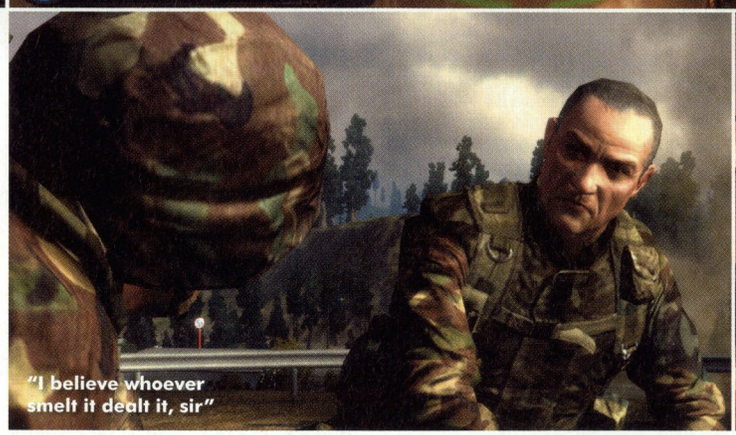
Using the keyboard to move the camera instead of just pushing the

OUT IN THE COLD Worried about a developer who has only done sci-fi suddenly trying to deliver a decent Cold War alternate history? Don't be. Massive hired Cold War thriller author extraordinaire (apparently) Larry Bond. This means you not only get (allegedly) realistic invasion scenarios, you also get human interest as the in-engine cutscenes focus on the trials and tribulations of individual soldiers.

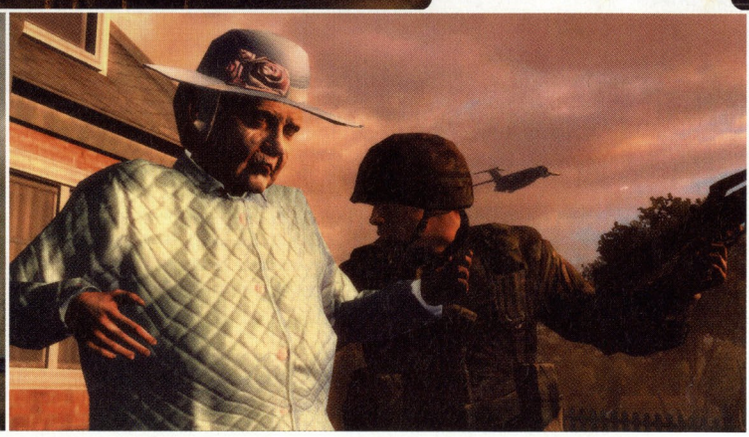


Not napalm. Not morning, Still love the smell.

!! Hopefully World in Conflict will be picked up by online gamers - we want more games to have dedicated local servers.



"I believe whoever smelt it dealt it, sir"



"Hurry up, Robin Williams as Mrs. Doubtfire, Ruskies coming!

mouse to the edge of the screen is a technique used by all competition-level RTS players, but WIC actually teaches you to use WASD right from the start.

So there's none of the static viewpoint you see in most RTS. It's not a distancing map with you watching over everything like a god. Instead, you're constantly switching the view, as you would in an FPS. As a method of engaging the player, it's awesome.

Essentially you spend all your time clicking on tanks and watching them blow up, but there's real strategic meat here. You have to hold strong points and at times dedicate precious units (your only real resource) to pursuing secondary objectives.

The best feature? Tactical support, without question. Engage the enemy (even as simply as exchanging fire) and you'll be awarded tactical points to spend on fire support. A handy menu allows you to choose everything from pinpoint artillery to air strikes to daisy-cutter bombs. Yes, there are tactical nukes too, but don't expect to be able to do much more with the map once you've deployed one.

ARMY OF ONE (OR MORE)

While the singleplayer campaign is compelling, with its intriguing flashback-punctuated plot arc, WIC is designed for multiplayer. Publisher Sierra is committed to providing Australian servers and has even hired an online manager for the game.

» Publisher Sierra is committed to providing Australian servers and has even hired an online manager

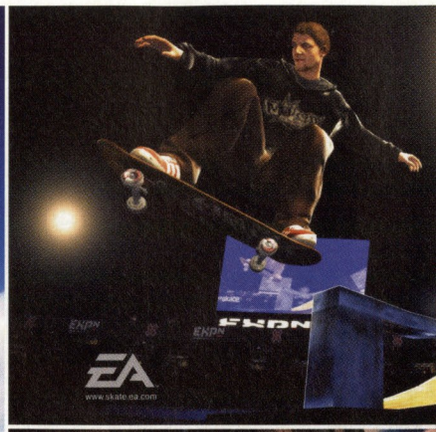
Featuring Massive's drop-in gameplay (you can join the fight halfway through a battle), multiplayer's real innovation is to allow allies to share tactical points. This means players can give tactical points to each other, and Massive expects to see a technique emerge where one player will be given most of the points as he/she demonstrates ability with artillery and airstrikes, creating a sort of surrogate "commander" role.

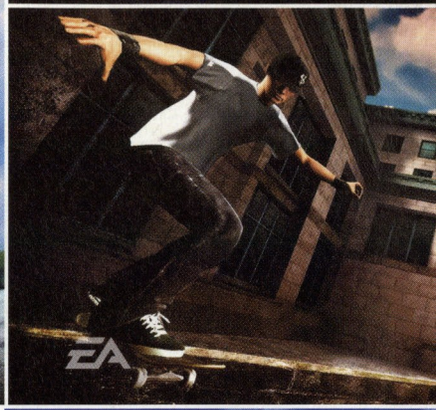
The reasons to NOT run out and buy WIC immediately are few. It's possible that for some players, the strategy just won't be hardcore enough. You don't need to worry about ammo or fuel or supply lines or... anything really. Units don't even persist from mission to mission, so there's not much incentive to not let all your boys be slaughtered in the last ten seconds.

Massive has its reasons for not including base building or resource gathering (keeping adrenalin levels high, apparently), but in this game there's real sense that construction and gathering could have added much to the experience. Appropriating civilian infrastructure for your base and stripping buildings, factories and even ships for resources would have added a welcome extra level of complexity.

As it is we're left with a fast, furious and occasionally frothy mil-sim-lite. It's easy to play, and you won't find much nuance until you jump in to the multiplayer. There though, World in Conflict has a real potential to shine. <<

Awesome visuals, adrenalin-pumping action	Actually base building would have been great here	HYPER VERDICT
Hardcore in spirit, immediate and engaging in execution. Mil sim lite.	VISUALS 93 / SOUND 91 / GAMEPLAY 89	89





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

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Skate

DANIEL WILKS is a big Girl

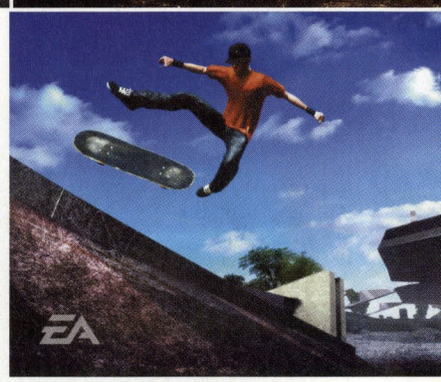
category: **Skating**
players: **1+**
developer: **EA Black Box**
publisher: **EA** / price: **$99.95**
rating: **M** / available: **Now**

Over the last couple of months we've mentioned games a few times that we feel have set the bar for games to come. We've had The Darkness setting a new watershed for storytelling and BioShock revitalizing the FPS. Now comes Skate, an original IP that reinvents the skating genre in such a fundamental way that other franchises (you know who are) are going to have to work pretty damn hard to keep up. Gone are the days of combining buttons and d-pad directions to pull off lengthy, superhuman combos. Skate is all about physics, experimentation and realism.

To truly enjoy Skate you really have to forget everything you have come accustomed to in the Tony Hawk franchise, the undisputed mainstay (and only real participant) of the genre. This is a hell of a lot harder than it sounds. For years we've been playing with buttons and d-pad but that is no longer the case. The Flick-It controls of Skate handle everything. Imaging, if you can, Fight Night on a board and you have some idea of what Skate is like.

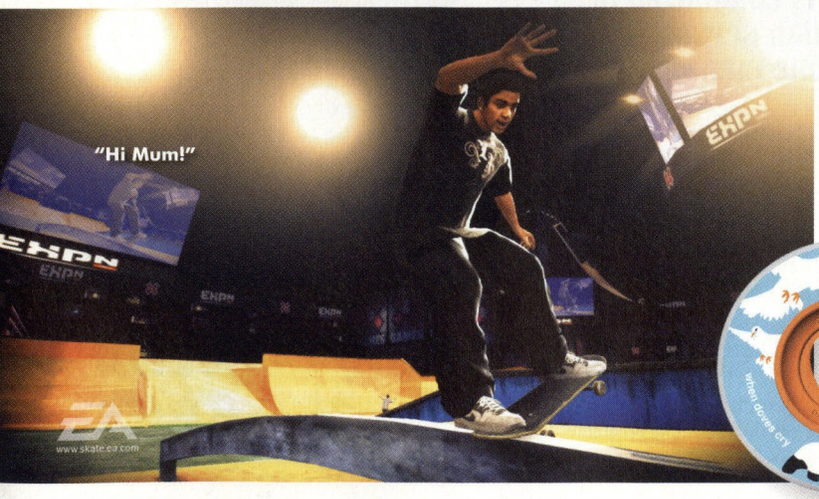
WHEN YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM, YOU MUST FLICK-IT

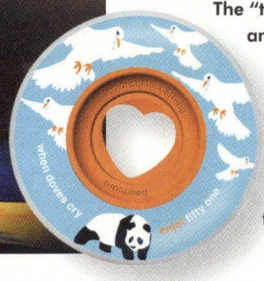
The left thumbstick controls the skater, the right the board. It sounds easy in theory but in reality the game has a learning curve somewhere between running up the stairs in the Empire State Building and climbing Everest. The basics are just that. You'll find yourself being able to pull off kickflips, heelflips, pop-shuvits and the like with a quick flick of the left thumbstick in no time flat but it will be some time before you'll find yourself being able to 360 nollie double heelflip to 50-50 rail and land in a nose manual, a move that would be simplicity in the Tony Hawk franchise. Instead of simply having to time button presses to pull off spectacular tricks (or even simple tricks for that matter) the player needs to time everything and also clearly keep an eye on the positioning of the skater's body and board – if either of those is out of like then there's one hell of a fall coming in the not too distant future.



[above] This may end with multiple broken bones

Aside from the basic flip tricks, players can also perform grabs with the triggers, each of which can be modified using the left thumbstick, enabling the player to perform different aerial tricks on pipes or jumps. Skating pipes





OPINION DEUX If I only had one word in which to surmise EA's Skate, that word would be "rad", but since I have a few more, here goes...

Skate is, more or less, everything I've been wishing that the Tony Hawk franchise would eventually evolve into, but hasn't.

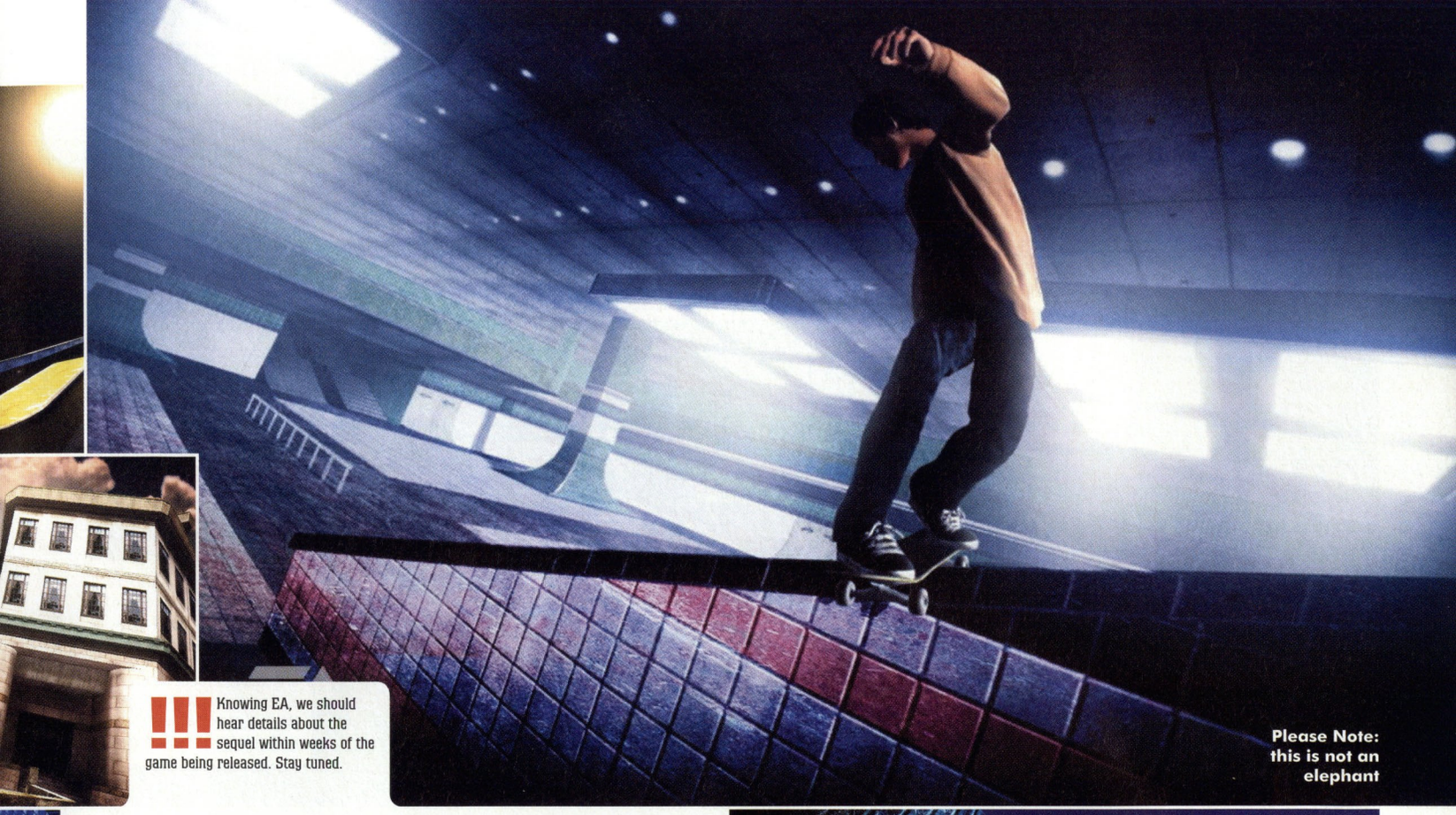
The emphasis on realism, instead to exaggeration, and pure skating, as opposed to gimmickry, make it an excitingly fresh prospect for gamers (like me) who've become increasingly jaded by the Birdman's yearly reiterations.

The "total skate control" scheme make even the simplest of tricks, like an ollie, feel like a real accomplishment, and although the learning curve is high, the payoff is definitely worth the effort.

At times the set challenges can be punishingly hard, and there are a few options (like being able to get off your board) that seem to be missing, but overall, these small foibles don't stop Skate from being the best skateboarding game I've ever played.

Don't get me wrong, the latest Tony Hawk looks like a step in the right direction, but it's going to find it very hard to beat Skate.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE.



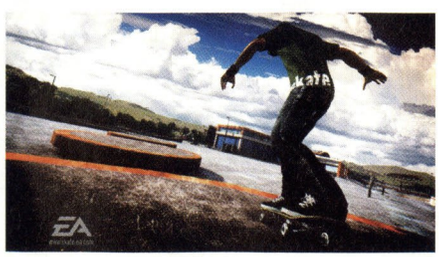
Please Note: this is not an elephant

Knowing EA, we should hear details about the sequel within weeks of the game being released. Stay tuned.

and bowls in Skate is a very different, not to mention difficult prospect. Instead of simply being able to hold a button down to gain speed, the key to pipes and bowls is timing pushes on the left thumbstick so the character crouches on the way up the side and pumps their legs coming down, constantly building speed and momentum.

As you can surmise, physics play a very important part in Skate. Everything the player does in game is constrained by the laws of physics. Some of these examples are rather obvious and logical – players aren't able to grind on power-lines or on the tops of moving cars and you definitely won't see a character pinwheeling through the air 30 foot up after a stack but other examples are far more subtle and have a more serious impact on gameplay. Probably the most important physics interaction is with grinding. In Skate when you hit a grind you slow down and start running out of momentum pretty fast, making long, high scoring grind combos a relatively rare thing, unless you can fins a sweet downhill section that is.

Wearing the T-shirt of the game you're in is not cool



RETURN TO BARCELCOUVERCISCO

The fictional city of San Vanelona is a fantastic place to skate, full of numerous hot spots to skate and fun little semi-hidden areas to find. The great thing about the city is that with the exception of a few key spots, nothing at all really screams out that it is a constructed line, leaving the player to discover their own lines, favourite spots and trick areas. Some of these spots are shown to the players during the career objectives but other have to be found through exploration. Never fear, some of the best spots can be found by following other skaters cruising around the city.

Benchmark though it may be, Skate is not without some problems, the most obvious of which being the number of tricks in the repertoire. Although the player has access to a good number of flip and grab tricks, some are strangely absent – why can players perform a pop-shuvit but not a shuvit? Flatland tricks are almost entirely absent as well, with the sole exception of manuals, powerslides and coffins. The manuals themselves are almost painfully hard to pull off as well – players need to hold the right thumbstick at a sweet spot around half way between the middle and top (for a nose manual) or half way between the middle and bottom (for a manual). Again this is something that sounds easy on paper but trying to transition between a trick and a manual is an exercise in frustration and reloading. Speaking of reloading, the load times are often quite painful. Players can skate clear across San Vanelona and not see a single loading screen but reload your save spot (you can save a start point anywhere in the city if you find a good line you want to try multiple times) and you could be waiting for up to 30 seconds to try a run again.

Boards - not compatible with bike racks

In Skate when you hit a grind you slow down and start running out of momentum pretty fast

Ultimately the good in Skate far outweighs the bad. Sure there is some frustration when it comes to the controls, both with the rather steep learning curve and the fact that the controls sometimes seem to register movements rather different to the ones you performed and the load times may be punishing at times but the simple joy of skating around San Vanelona and pulling off that one perfect trick really makes it all fade away. Skate is only the first game in the franchise and, if it's anything like the Tony Hawk franchise we won't see what it's truly capable of until the second game. We can't wait. <<

Great controls; fantastic city; looks great	No flatland tricks; manuals; control inaccuracy	HYPER VERDICT
Rewrites the rules of the skating genre – bring on the sequel	VISUALS 91	SOUND 95	GAMEPLAY 92	90

!!! Everything you do in Juiced 2 is recorded as "Driver DNA" which is then turned into an A.I. profile. This profile can then be traded and used as a racing opponent or ally in the game. It doesn't affect the main game that much, but it's a very cool addition nonetheless.

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

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE lives life a quarter mile at a time.

category: **Racing**
players: **1-Multi**
developer: **Juice Games**
publisher: **THQ**
price: **X360 $99.95, PS3 $109.95, PS2, PSP, PC $69.95, DS $59.95**
rating: **TBA** / available: **October 18**

The original Juiced had a somewhat tumultuous lifecycle, starting production at Acclaim just before they filed for bankruptcy in 2004, and then floating around in development hell before being picked up by THQ, reworked and finally released to a lukewarm critical reception in 2005.

This time around Juiced Games have had a relatively drama-free development cycle, and it shows, since if there's one thing to take away from Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights, it's that it's better than its predecessor in every conceivable way.

Where's Xzibit when you need him?

RACING AND BEWBS!

For starters, the entire atmosphere of Juiced has been given an overhaul. The new "Hot Import Nights" theme adds a certain flavour not seen in other tuner games, and while the abundance of barely-clothed women won't sit well with all players, their incessant gyrating is sure to win over the game's target audience.

The racing too is a whole lot sexier. The controls have been tightened up considerably and have a more arcade racing feel, while still requiring you to brake at corners. The new drifting gameplay is difficult to master, but amazingly useful once grasped (particularly in the drifting comps, funnily enough).

The career mode has also recieved some love. You still have to participate in races, winning them until you move up a rank and continue on to harder opponents, however, Juiced 2 does add a brilliant new feature in its bonus challenges. Each race has a couple of extra objectives, including beating a particular driver, winning a bet, hitting a specific top speed and more. If you manage to complete these side missions you'll receive a wad of cash for your efforts, even if you didn't snag first place in the actual race.

Once you've earned a dollar or two you can spend them building up your car. First you're presented with a dealership packed with vehicles from Audi, Citroën, Ford, Honda, Cooper, Nissan, Pontiac, Volkswagen and more. Not all of the top manufacturers are present, particularly the big-name exotic sportscars, but Juiced 2 manages a decent selection nonetheless.

Once you've chosen your ride you can add paint (including pearl, flake, matt, metallic and more), and up to 50 layers of decals that you can use to decorate your car. While you can make some classy looking rides, we instead chose to make ours look as cheesy as possible, with some neon blue pinstripes and a whole mess of blue flames on the bonnet. Trust me, it looks sweet.

To unlock new performance upgrades (speed, steering nitrous etc.) you first have to prove that you've earned them by participating in a variety of different racing and drifting trials, which while it's a nice idea, we found that it was a bit too easy to get the best upgrades in each class straight off the bat.

Also thrown into the mix is the betting system, including both cash and pink slips that can be gambled either offline or online in multiplayer. Betting money and especially pinks takes online racing and even single-player races up a notch in the excitement stakes, and thankfully, unlike its predecessor, if you lose and bankrupt yourself, it isn't game over.

All up, Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights fixes what was broke with the original game, and adds a number or really fun features to a solid tuner game formula. If you liked the original juiced, you're going to like this one a whole lot better. <<

Great new atmosphere and career mode. Controls massively improved.

Lacks big-name exotic sportscars, upgrades are a bit easy to unlock.

HYPER VERDICT

Juiced 2 leaves the original eating dust.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
85	86	87	**87**

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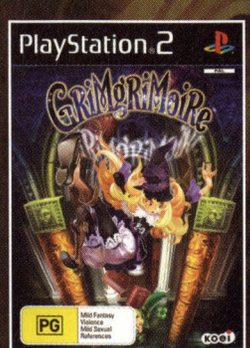
PG Mild Fantasy Violence, Mild Sexual References



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!!! The level design, though linear, is really quite spectacular and varied, from the bright and airy Faerie realm, through to the dusty war world and soaked undersea city.

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

Folklore

DANIEL WILKS would rather just go to the pub

category: **Adventure**
players: **1**
developer: **Game Republic**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **TBA**
available: **October 18**

You might remember that we were pretty keen on Folklore a few issues back. We was enamoured with the way it looked and liked the way the combat system used the SixAxis without the mechanic feeling too tacked on. Well, the good news is that we still like those things about Folklore. The overall design of the levels and creatures is very good and the animations for the two main characters, Keats, the cynical crusading journalist and Ellen, the naïve blonde are full of character. The combat system, utilising the SixAxis controller is still pretty nifty as well. Unfortunately, Folklore is one of those games that does not equal the sum of its parts and instead of being a must have adventure/RPG for the PS3 comes across as a muddled and sometimes very lazy mish-mash of genres.

BLARNEY!

Set in the Irish town of Doolin and in the Faerie Netherworld, Folklore tells the story of a young girl and a journalist drawn to the mysterious town by even more mysterious messages and becoming embroiled in a murder mystery that sees them traveling between the real world and the Faerie realms. Whilst we use the term "tells the story", the truth of the matter is that Folklore drip-feeds the story to the player at a frustratingly slow pace, only giving the player the barest details of what is going on with the plot. Quests typically see the characters entering the Netherworld to track down the memories of dead people to find out how they died and what that has to do with the story but these confrontations almost inevitably lead to a conversation that simply points to another person to talk to rather than any real revelations. After the first few quests this stops being engaging and simply becomes annoying.

In between conversations, players fight their way through the Netherworld using a combat system that manages to merge the collection aesthetic of Pokemon with button mashing and motion control. Both Ellen and Keats have the ability to draw the souls from defeated Folk using a few simple motion control mini-games, souls that can then be mapped to a face button to act as an attack or defense. At first this approach is interesting and fun but it soon becomes apparent that nearly all of the Folk fall into a few categories making it unnecessary to change your keyed attacks and defenses aside from in the case of a few Folk that are only vulnerable to certain other Folk, a mechanic that feels quite contrived. Ellen and Keats also need to defeat giant Folklore dotted throughout the Netherworld. These end of level bosses are well designed in terms of appearance but the fights are rarely more than chores. Instead of having to work out how to kill these Folklore themselves, players are instead given visual clues from picture-book pages, showing them exactly what to do in each of the stages of the fight.

Another area in which Folklore really suffers is cutscenes. Only a few of the conversations and cutscenes in the game are animated and voice acted (those scant few are spectacular), while the rest are presented in either a barely animated comic panel format or a very standard two profile shot with speech bubbles. It comes across as very lazy.

There are a lot of things to like about Folklore but unfortunately they are outweighed by the wealth of frustrations, such as the painfully slowly drip-fed story, the repetitive combat system and the lazy cutscenes. It feels like a game that isn't sure what it wants to be – an adventure/RPG/collect-'em-up/murder mystery/action just doesn't have enough focus or cohesion to appeal. <<

Hitting one faerie with another seems a tad fetishistic

Well-designed characters and monsters; great world design

Drip-fed story; lacks cohesion; lazy cutscenes

HYPER VERDICT

An interesting adventure hamstrung by a lack of cohesion and ambition

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
89	78	68	**68**

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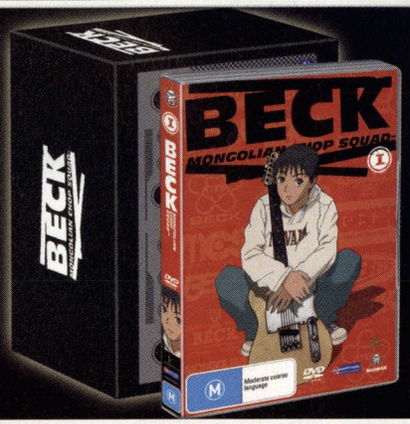

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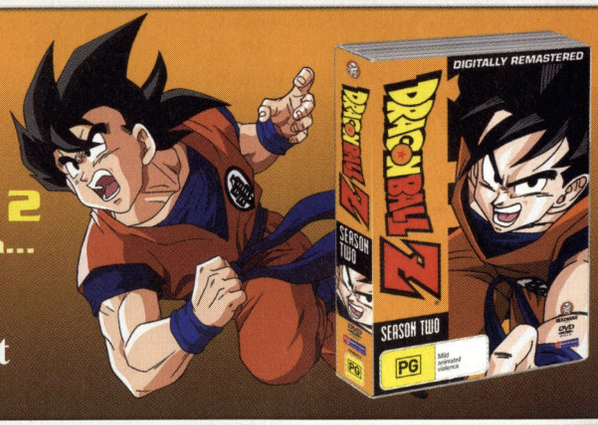

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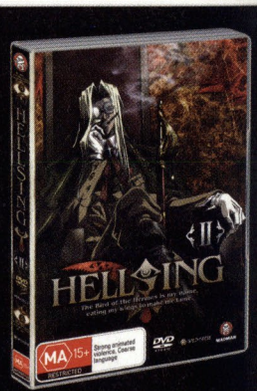

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!!! Ho ho, we scored Space Giraffe a teapot out of a hundred. We're priceless. Seriously though, if we were pressed to score it using slightly more numerical values we'd give it something like this – it's good damnit!

VISUALS: **82**
SOUND: **80**
GAMEPLAY: **90**
OVERALL: **90**

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

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Space Giraffe

Congraturations! You Success! A winner is **MAURICE BRANSCOMBE!**

category: **Shooter**
players: **1**
developer: **Llamasoft**
publisher: **Llamasoft**
price: **400 Microsoft Points**
rating: **G** / available: **Now**

If you know the name Jeff Minter, then you've probably already got your copy of Space Giraffe and have been blissfully running up the online leaderboards. If you don't, then all you need to know is that the man has been churning out the purest kinds of gaming genius for more than a quarter of a century, ranging from shooters about mutant camels, to games about mowing lawns.

His latest composition combines the essence of one of his most brilliant games with gameplay and visuals unlike anything else on the Xbox Live Arcade. This is Space Giraffe, and it's completely bonkers.

CONGOATULATIONS!

From the outset Space Giraffe tells you that this game "is not Tempest!" Yes, that is a direct quote from the game. While at first glance the two games may look essentially identical, there is definitely far more going on underneath this Giraffe's saddle.

Like Tempest 2000 you still have to run your ship around the outside edge of each wire-framed level, often in a full 360-degree loop, as waves of enemies and bullets come down the wire at you. In this respect you can play Space Giraffe just as if it were a Tempest game, simply dodging and shooting until your three lives are up, however, if you play it this way you'll only ever achieve mediocre scores.

The real key to mastering Space Giraffe is learning how to use the game's new "power zone" and "bulling" techniques. The power zone is a white line that fluctuates up and down the playing field based on how many enemies you kill. When it's high you have the ability to bash enemies off the edge of the playing field, called "bulling", while letting your power zone drop not only leaves you vulnerable to attack, but it also means that you can't score maximum points.

Other special features include collecting jump pods that make your Giraffe leap around the outside of the level (and automatically fill your power zone) and a smart bomb, which destroys all nearby foes when it all becomes too much for you.

All these features combine to form something far more complex and challenging than your average shooter, and even one so well regarded as Tempest 2000. It takes a lot of practice to master the balance of keeping your power zone up while simultaneously letting as many enemies through to the baseline as possible, so you can bull them off and reap the richest point rewards.

Space Giraffe also looks gorgeous, in a seizure-causing kind of way. The entire game flashes and pops almost incessantly and the intensely weird and mostly nonsensical graphical and audio design is one of its highlights.

Every time you destroy an enemy you'll hear a variety of sounds ranging from barnyard bleats, telephone rings, unintelligible mutterings and other sounds that most definitely do not belong in a space shooter, giving Space Giraffe a bizarre and always tongue-in-cheek synaesthesic soundscape. There's even a few very odd hidden images in each level, including more barnyard animals and the giant face of J Allard, Microsoft's Corporate Vice President.

Space Giraffe is an utterly addictive shoot 'em up, with the most suitably ridiculous atmosphere we've seen in some time, and at 400 MS Points ($6.60) it would be poor form of us not to wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone who loves a good shmup. Just make sure you have someone nearby to stop you from swallowing your tongue. <<

This is not Tempest

This is not Tempest either

Psychedelic, synaesthesic madness/ deep and addictive shmuping.

You may have several seizures.

HYPER VERDICT

Congoatulations Minter, you've made another classic.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
FLOWER!	SEASHELL!	GOAT!

TEA-POT!

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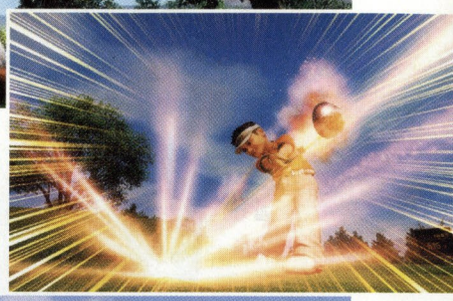
!!! Everybody's Golf 5 hasn't been scheduled for a local release as yet but fingers crossed it will eventually arrive

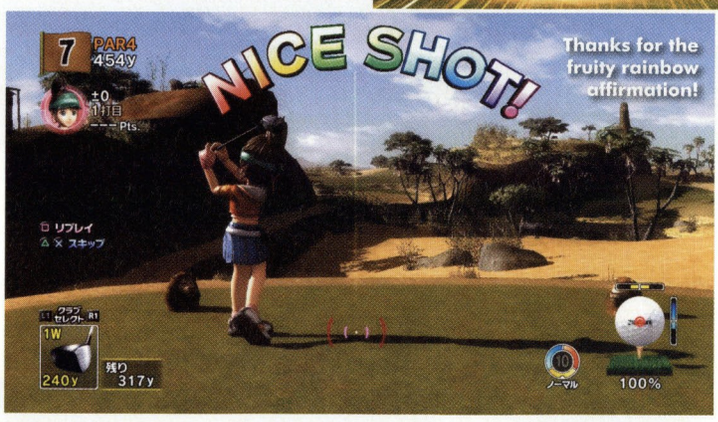
X360 / **PS3** / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP



Minna no Golf 5

JONTI DAVIES spoils a nice walk.

category: **Sports**
players: **1-4 (offline), 2-50 (online)**
developer: **ClapHanz**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **¥5800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**



This series has been progressing on Sony platforms for more than a decade – you might know it as Everybody's Golf or Hot Shots Golf. In Japan, it's called Minna no Golf. Any which way you look at it, ClapHanz has produced a formula for fun golf simulation that is even more enduring than Nintendo's similar Mario Golf efforts.

In Minna no Golf 5, the PS3 hardware is put to great use, building on the strengths of recent PS2-based Japanese versions' online play and using the machine's impressive processing power to motor what is easily the prettiest console golf game yet seen. Online competition now caters for 50-player tournaments, where all other human players can be seen as they golf around the course. It's an intriguing sight – something like a golf circus – but it makes for online play that is both immediate and quickly rewarding. For a golf game, that's saying something.

The main surprise here, though, is that ClapHanz has made the bold move of introducing a brand new control system. The time-tested traditional play mode – one click for power as a gauge fills, and another click for accuracy when the marker swings back to its origin – is still here. (So there's no need to worry, all you Everybody's Golf loyalists.) But it's now complemented with a control method that uses ever decreasing circles: using fine timing, you need to click just as the circles displayed contract to tightly encircle the ball. It's a slightly quicker method and it already has its fans among the Japanese Mingol hardcore, but – try as we might – we just can't get used to it. Most of the time, the game enables you to select your preferred control setup, but there are certain challenges that can only be completed by playing with the new system.

Still, as with every previous entry in the series, Minna no Golf 5 uses a finely honed reward system to encourage you to continue playing. It's highly effective, to the point that (even if, like us, you struggle with it) the new controls become acceptable as a kind of hurdle. The incentives on offer in Challenge Mode are plentiful and varied: new clubs, caddies, outfits, balls, courses, character level-ups... there's always something to play for. The fact that it looks and sounds so utterly lovely is also a strong source of encouragement – you'll constantly be looking forward to whatever visual/audio splendor the next course might bring.

In single-player, through its comprehensive Challenge Mode and online tournaments, there's sufficient content here to certify Minna no Golf 5 as one of the most generous PS3 titles to date. And in multiplayer, whether offline or on, the game's lightheartedness and the simplicity of its control systems (particularly the old-fashioned styling of the original control method here) sets it as a fine party title. <<

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

[below] "Keep your eye on the ball, not my enormous head"

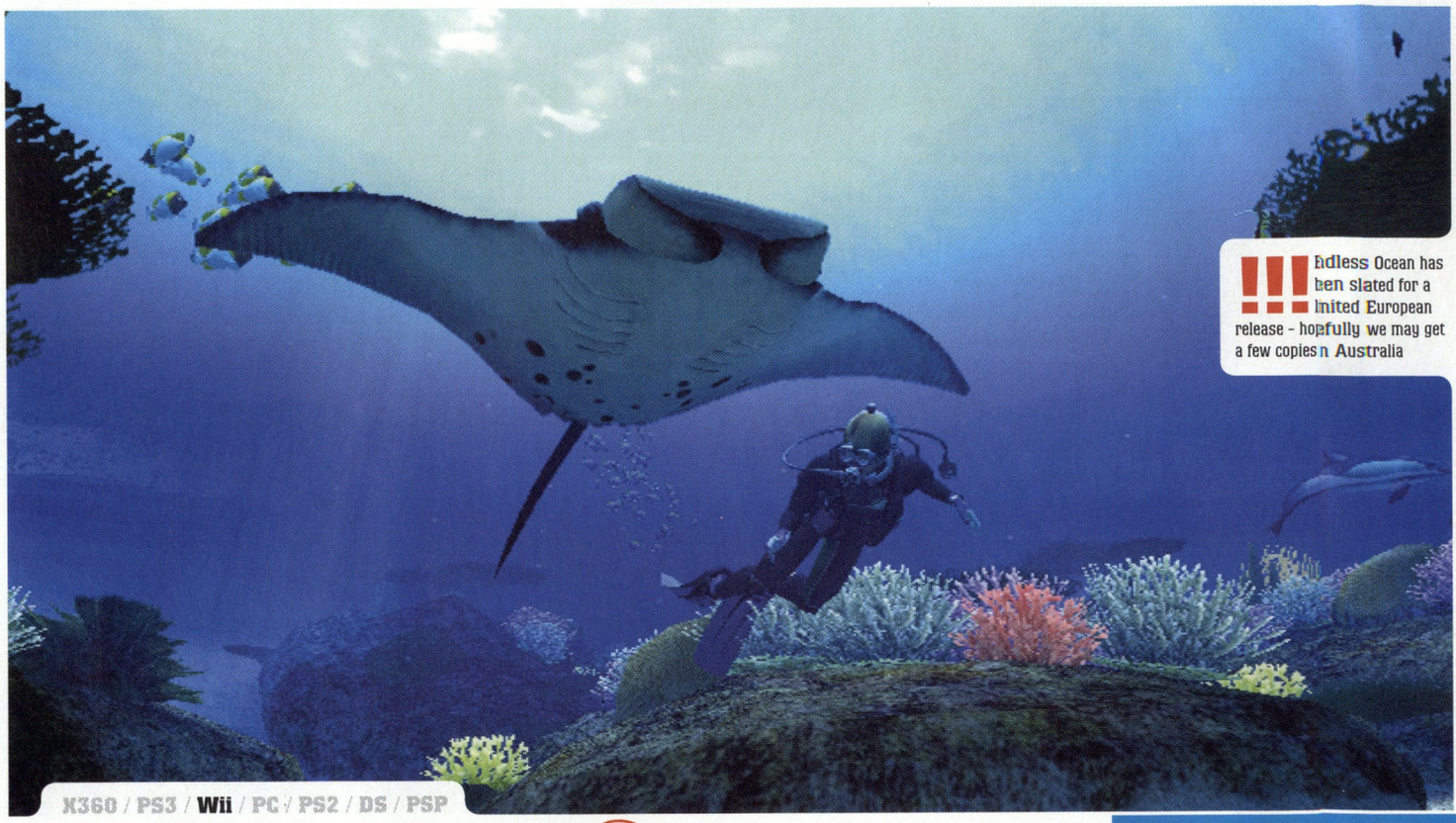
Looks terrific; player characters are entertaining; online play is a riot

It's only golf; the new controls take some getting used to.

HYPER VERDICT

It's Everybody's Golf, prettier and more fulfilling than ever before

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
92	88	90	**91**



Endless Ocean has been slated for a limited European release - hopefully we may get a few copies in Australia

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

Endless Ocean

HYPER IMPORT REVIEW

JONTI DAVIES visits the darkest depths of educational software.

category: **Adventure**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Arika**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **¥5800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**

Lets just hope Flipper doesn't get frisky

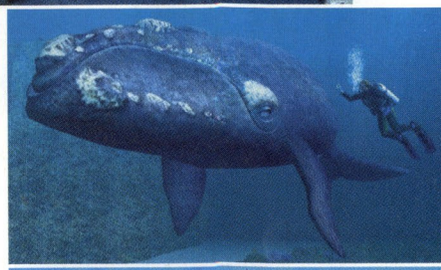
Although this is a Nintendo-published Wii game, Endless Ocean is moored in Arika's PS2 Everblue games. The idea here is that you've gone scuba diving in a made-up ocean, and you're setting out to discover as many species of marine life (not made-up, but real earthly varieties) as you can possibly find. To increase the range of species here, Endless Ocean permits you to dive as deep as 180 metres. So, what's down there?

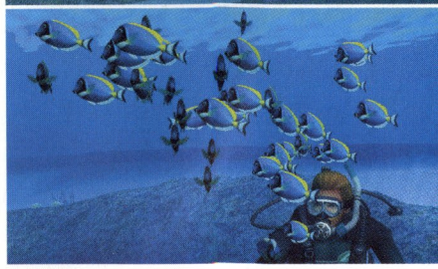
Surprisingly, considering Arika's position as a third-party, it has managed to work with the Wii hardware to concoct the most beautiful Wii production to date. Especially in widescreen and viewed through component output, Endless Ocean looks spectacularly realistic. It almost elevates Wii graphics to the level of its HD rivals. The key to Arika's success in this department is its mastery of lighting and animation, where smoothly moving marine species (and a nicely animated scuba diver avatar) swim through the deeps and are occasionally drowned in filtered sunlight. Makes you feel like journeying to the reef right away.

Endless Ocean's audio elements are also strong, with well coordinated sound effects shaping the sonic environment against the lush tones of New Zealand soprano Hayley Westenra. And for those among you who have musical tastes that are at odds with Westenra's delivery, this is the second Wii game (after Excite Truck) to feature custom soundtracks. Just pop your MP3s on an SD card and you'll be able to colour the sounds of your own deep aquatic experience.

In terms of its concept and realization, Endless Ocean isn't quite so convincing. From your boat, you set off on a number of dives to locate certain types of fish. And that's essentially it. Dive, search, then feed and photograph various species. It feels like navigating a fantastic encyclopedia of sea creatures – and admittedly, it is a gorgeously presented document – but it never really clicks into something you could describe as a game in the traditional sense of the word. If you want underwater challenge, check out Ecco the Dolphin.

Having said that, the control system here is excellently suited to this kind of experience: you only need to hold the Wii Remote and point in the direction you wish to swim, occasionally tapping buttons to pet the fish (which brings up a screen full of information concerning the species) and feed them. It makes for a relaxing and soothing experience, which also doubles as an educational journey. Don't consider this if you demand any level of challenge from your games, but do by all means indulge if you're just happy to see the sea. <<





[below] **How not to make shark fin soup**

Gorgeous seascapes; custom soundtracks; relaxing gameplay

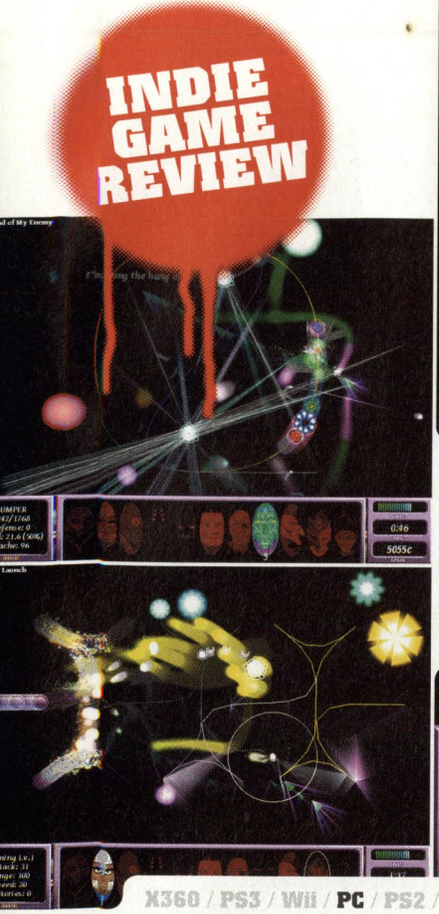
Lack of challenge; repetitive processes.

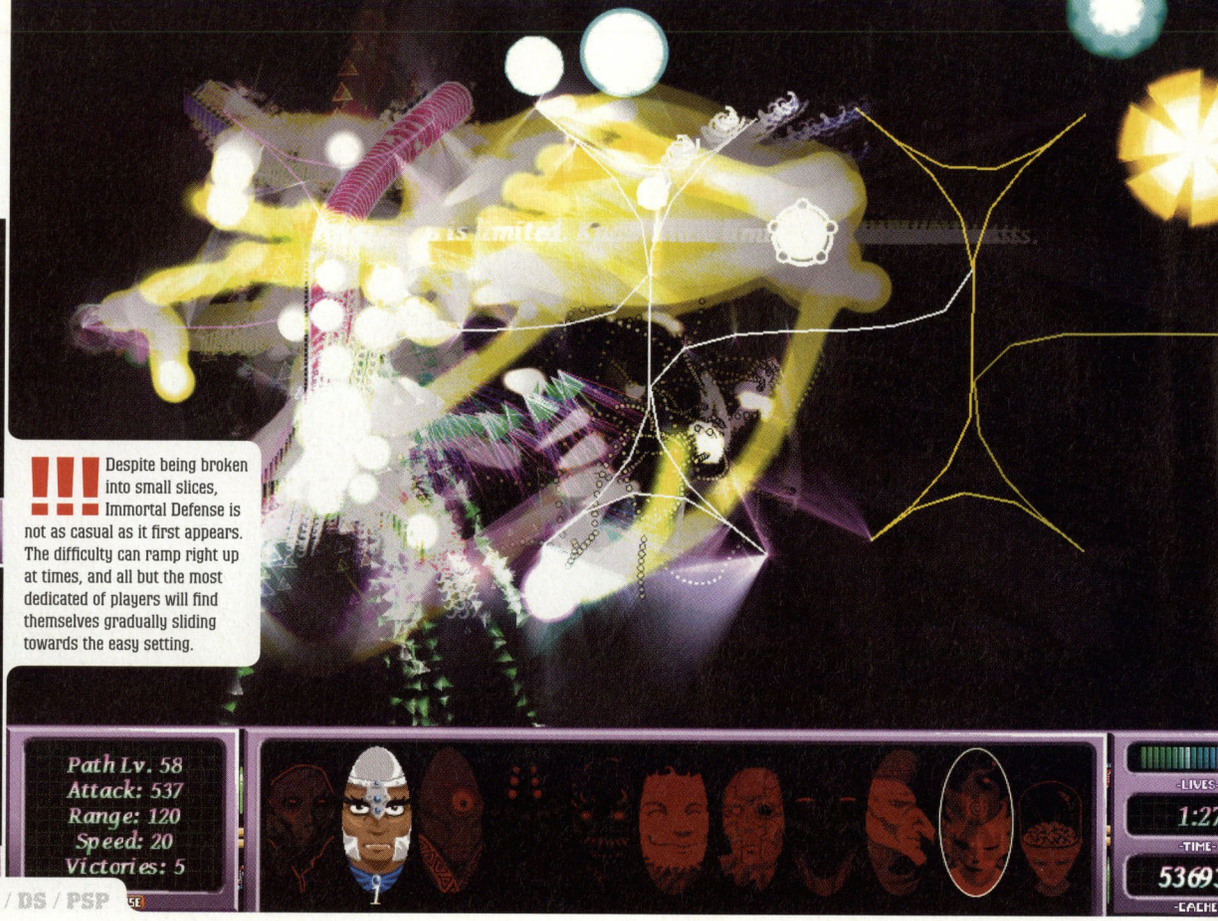
HYPER VERDICT

A very beautiful Wii game (there's a first), but it's just a bit too aimless

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
85	75	65	73

INDIE GAME REVIEW





Despite being broken into small slices, Immortal Defense is not as casual as it first appears. The difficulty can ramp right up at times, and all but the most dedicated of players will find themselves gradually sliding towards the easy setting.

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

Immortal Defense

TIM HENDERSON still hasn't seen Tron

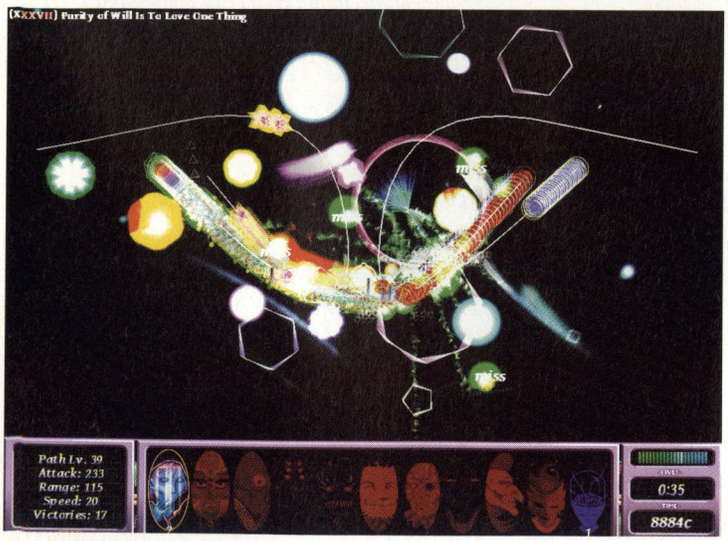
category: **Point Defence**
players: **1**
developer: **Radical Poesis Games & Creations**
publisher: **Radical Poesis Games & Creations**
price: **US $22.95** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now**

You have abandoned your body to become an immortal star in pathspace. You are the defender of Dukis, a land under threat. A land that protects your body while your greater essence protects everybody else. Fleets of enemy ships are approaching through hyperspace, and it is the duty of you and whatever other ghostly allies (and enemies) you may meet out in the great cosmos to do something about it. Considering the magnitude of such a job description, it really is just as well that hyperspace seems to exist as a squiggly, but wholly linear, wireframe line.

SECRET MILKSHAKE

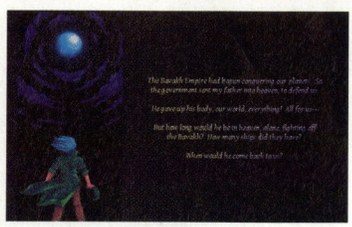
There's no denying it: the use of wireframe graphics, and simple geometry within this stylistic confine is a very effective way to look good without the need of huge technical marvels or over-intricate visual design. Because of this, Immortal Defense manages to be quite appealing without having to work either itself or the player's hardware too hard. The only trade-off is that it lacks a grounded sense if identity. This decade has seen the likes of Rez, Darwinia and Geometry Wars among others all tweak design aesthetics based around primitive processor restrictions to create their own distinctive look to the point where the method is fast becoming old-hat.

[below] The seizure machines have been set to kill!



Immortal Defense's appearance, although missing the sense of proper artistic direction that the above titles contained – effects tend to become random screen clutter, and character portraits are at odds with the playfield display – does benefit, quite fortunately, from a perspective of pure gameplay. This is a game where the entirety of your objective is to stop whatever comes out of Point A from making it as far as Point B. The path followed is quite literally a bendy line that the threats will monorail across until they either get past your defences, or are destroyed by them.

As for this defending business itself, it's a mix of preplanning and of quick thinking in the heat of actual battle. As the game progresses new tools of differing uses and practicality are introduced, each costing a certain number of points to lay out by the hyperspace path; points that will be replenished appropriately against your own efficiency. The increase in complexity is well thought out, and the progression from using your curser to attack in the real-time field of combat to planning your defences and even adding to them once combat is underway feels entirely natural.



Every single mission is framed by a story that has high aspirations but falls slightly short due to writing that doesn't quite equal to the ambition. A shame, really, as it's easy to see what it's aiming for and to spot some very real potential; as it stands though, Immortal Defense's greatest asset may actually be its sound. A mix of playfully epic music and glassy effects, it sets the tone perfectly and displays the kind of consistency that, if applied to the overall package, could elevate it from good to great. <<

Agreeable learning curve; fitting use of audio

Inconsistent visuals that rely too heavily upon clutter

HYPER VERDICT

An enjoyable piece of strategy, broken down into bite-sized portions.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
70	88	74	**77**

IT JUST GETS HOTTER!

ALL JUST $19.95 RRP EACH!

*$24.95 IN NZ.

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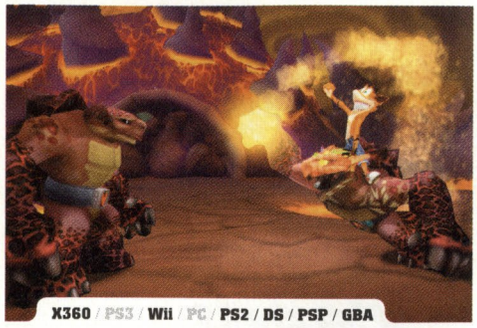
UBISOFT



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

Crash of the Titans

category: **Action/Platformer**
players: **1**
developer: **Radical Entertainment**
publisher: **Vivendi**
price: **$49.95 (PS2, PSP, GBA), $59.95 (DS), $79.95 (Wii), $89.95 (360)**
rating: **G**
available: **October**

Crash is back for yet another adventure but this time, according to the PR spin we received before the game code arrived, he's got an urban flavour. Don't worry – it doesn't mean that now he's trying to rap in his silly nonsensical jabbering (why he still can't talk when everyone else can is beyond us) – his urban flavour comes in the form of some tribal tattoos on his furry arms.

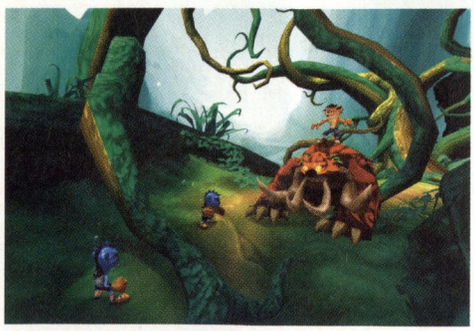
This time around, Crash has access to a magical mask that allows him to control creatures within the game world and use their abilities. Although this sounds like an interesting mechanic, what it boils down to in gameplay terms is Crash punching a bunch of stuff (he has new attack moves that are essentially only a cosmetic revamp) and then taking over the biggest creature in the area and mashing the same buttons for attacks that do more damage. Occasionally the player will have to use one of these creatures to solve a puzzle but these occasions are very obvious and require no real effort to solve aside from repeatedly hitting the attack buttons. It's all quite shallow but should appeal to gamers looking for a colourful, unchallenging action/platformer fix.

Some of the voice acting and humour in Crash of the Titans is quite effective but we really have to question why it is that all of Dr Cortex's minions sound like Professor Frink doing a bad Jerry Lewis impersonation. The fact that Frink is himself a Jerry Lewis impersonation should clue you in on just how bad these voice samples are.

DIRK WATCH

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	72	65	65



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

Custom Robo: Arena

category: **Action/RPG**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Nintendo**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **$TBA**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Although the Custom Robo series has quite a following on it's home turf, Nintendo's miniature robot simulation is yet to make a splash in the Western market. Nevertheless, Nintendo are giving the series a second crack at the world stage, with Custom Robo: Arena for the DS.

Made up of equal parts RPG, robot-constructor and one-on-one fighting game, Custom Robo: Arena is an interesting concept that performs excellently as a portable game.

The RPG elements play out in top-down 2D, where you'll meet allies, rivals and play through an unfolding story. Meanwhile, the robot construction and battling take place in 3D, with the DS managing to put out some simplistic, but attractive polygonal graphics.

The robo battles in particular look good for the handheld, and pleasantly enough the fights are reminiscent of Capcom's Power Stone series of fighting games, giving you a large open area to duke it out with your competitor using both melee and ranged combat. Your Robo can be equipped with new guns, missiles and bombs, and you can also change their legs, torso and jump pods, among a few other variables.

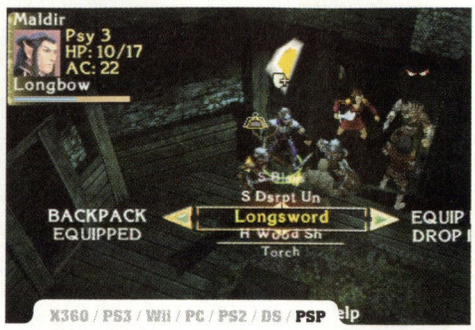
Overall, however, the battles are a bit too easy to win, as the computer-controlled opponents rarely offer anything more than a weak resistance to your attacks. The DS's touch-screen is also sadly under-utilised, with the only noteworthy use of the feature being a pretty gimmicky "cleaning" mini-game, which sees you rubbing down your mini mechanical man to keep him clean and running smoothly.

While not flawless (the soundtrack for one, is terrible), Custom Robo: Arena is a very solid action/RPG.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
74	45	80	79



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

D&D Tactics

category: **Strategy**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Kuju**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

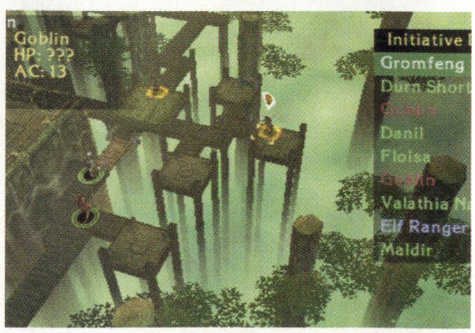
It's a pity that D&D Tactics doesn't come bundles with the D&D 3.5 edition books because that could make it a far better game than it already is. The fact that the core rules to 3.5 edition D&D are broken into three books is quite telling. There's a hell of a lot of rules and, even though the rules have been streamlined from the first and second edition rules, an average tabletop game will feature its fair share of rules checking. The density of the 3.5 rules makes D&D Tactics a difficult game to approach for a novice, as none of the terminology of skills are adequately explained. Unfortunately the same goes for D&D veterans, as many of the core abilities and rules have been tweaked to make them fit better with a handheld tactics game, leaving them out in the cold as well.

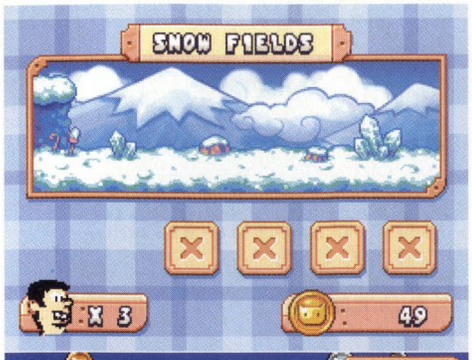
What should be the highlight of the game, an indeed the only real component of the game, combat, is rendered a rather horrendously slow and dull affair due to the interpretation of the rules as well as the menu system. Players need to wade through reams of menus to perform any task and until reaching somewhere around level ten combat is a chore as most characters will miss far more than they hit, making combats that should take minutes at most draw on for ten times as long. If the combat was fun long fights wouldn't be a problem but watching a fighter flail away with a sword and miss a zombie three times out of four is just punishing.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
79	80	55	50





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

Drawn to Life

category: **Platformer**
players: **1**
developer: **5th Cell**
publisher: **THQ**
price: **$69.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Drawn to Life is an utterly charming platformer meets character creator perfect for the Nintendo DS. Players take the role of a hero drawn by the Creator, a deity responsible for drawing the world into reality in a book known as the book of life. As the plot would have it, a villain by the name of Wilfre (not very villainous, we know) has torn the pages from the Book of Life and drawn his own creations, leading the world to be plunged into darkness and plagued by evil beasties. Acting as both the hero and the Creator, players guide their created hero (drawn over a simple frame) through multiple levels of fairly straightforward yet very solid platforming fun. At various points through the adventure the player is called upon to draw pieces of equipment or terrain to aid the hero. The way things are drawn has no real effect on the gameplay – drawing a formless blob for a jump pad is no less effective than drawing a beautifully detailed spring – but the ability to influence the game world really helps to draw the player into the adventure. Unfortunately, Drawn to Life is a little simple for a seasoned gamer, offering very little in terms of challenge. That said, it's still a very fun and utterly charming way to waste a good number of hours, not to mention rack up a fair bit of neck strain as you hunch over the screen drawing.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	68	86	84

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

Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions

category: **Strategy RPG**
players: **1-2**
developer: **SquareEnix**
publisher: **SquareEnix**
price: **$TBA**
rating: **PG**
available: **October 4**

Released in 1997, the original Final Fantasy Tactics was hailed a classic in its own time, and, although it was never released in PAL territories, it still managed to build up a hardcore following. Ten years later, and we're finally getting the game that many consider the best Strategy RPG ever made.

Now, I'm going to sound like a heathen saying this, but I never thought the original Final Fantasy Tactics was all that visually impressive. The original character designs did have charm to them, and while the game's 3D isometric world with 2D sprites worked well, it was never going to be particularly pretty.

The same applies here. The game has its charm, but at the end of the day, Tactics is all about function over form. There is only one advantage that the PSP hardware lends the game, and that's a proper 16:9 aspect ratio.

The single-player campaign is still essentially untouched, with two sides taking turns to move, attack, heal and use magic to defeat their opponent.

There are of course a few previously unseen features, including two new job classes and a number of guest appearances from FFXII characters.

However, the best new feature is the wireless multiplayer, allowing two strategists to play either a competitive battle or a cooperative campaign over the PSP's Ad-Hoc connection.

Honestly, we do have to admit that there's not enough new content here to justify a repeat purchase but if you've never played the original Final fantasy Tactics before, but always wanted to, then there's no better introduction to the series than The War of the Lions.

FRANK DRY

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
70	77	90	89

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

Pangya! Golf with Style

category: **Golf**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Ntreev**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

How much you like Pangya will depend on how much you like golf...and anime themed strangeness. Based on a popular free online golf MMO (known variously as Albatross and Pangya) combining fantastical settings, character customization and serious golf gameplay, Pangya! Golf With Style, in it's own words is "Fantasy Golf" with "Real Swings". That about sums the game up perfectly. It looks silly and lighthearted but the gameplay is very typical serious golf game. Players swing the club much like you would in Wii Sports Golf, but instead of speed and direction being the deciding factor of the shot, Pangya instead insists on angle, speed and consistence. As a result the swing is much slower than you would expect for a golf game, feeling a little unnatural at first. Good shots reward the player with points that can be used to purchase new equipment and clothing to boost your character's golfing stats. While the controls are fairly solid, as is the gameplay, the simple combining of fantasy settings with real golf really doesn't work as cohesively as it should, leading to a game that feels like it is trying to appeal to far too broad a market to have any real appeal to anyone. If you're after an immediate golf fix then Pangya! will fit the bill but if you're a true golf fan you're probably best off getting another iteration of Tiger Woods.

RAYMOND P SHOTWELL

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	80	75	73

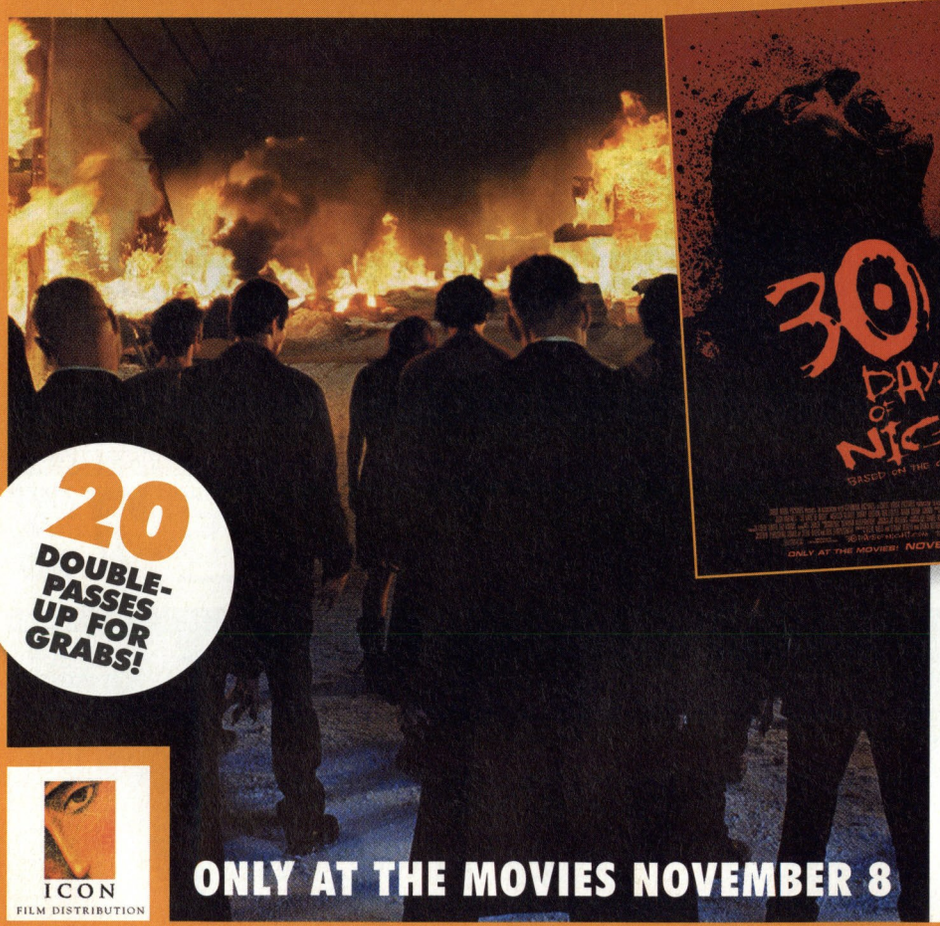
WinWinWin

WIN CRASH OF THE TITANS FOR XBOX 360 AND A CRASH RUBIK'S CUBE!

>> Crash Bandicoot is back! Again! And this time he's pissed off! Well, not exactly pissed off, more miffed at the fact that his entire family has once again been kidnapped by Dr Neo Cortex. You'd think that with all his experience dealing with the nefarious large-headed doctor that Crash would have taken out an apprehended violence order or something of the sort. Maybe they don't have that kind of thing in the jungle and maybe you have to be able to speak a language other than a series of grunts and squeaks to get one. Oh well, no matter.

All you need to do for a chance to win a copy of Crash of the Titans on Xbox 360 is **tell us, in 50 words or less, what animal would make a good platforming mascot and why?**

Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Not Ray Harryhausen, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.



WIN 30 DAYS OF NIGHT DOUBLE PASSES!

>> One lucky winner will also receive a 30 Days of Night poster signed by creator Ben Templesmith!

You may never have heard of the comic upon which it is based but 30 Days of Night is shaping up to be a cracker of a movie. Set in the sleepy, secluded town of Barrow, Alaska, a town that is covered in complete darkness for 30 days each year, 30 Days of Night tells the story of a husband and wife battling for their lives and for the fate of the town they love when vampires descend to feast on the inhabitants during the month long night. 30 Days of Night hits the big screen on November 8.

All you need to do for a chance to win a double pass to 30 Days of Night is **tell us, in 50 words or less, If you were a vampire, where would you rather be than Alaska?**

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

WinWinWin

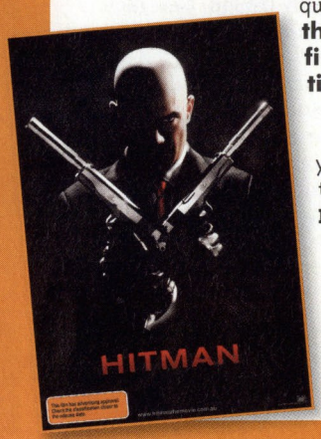
WIN SOME AWESOME KANE & LYNCH AND HITMAN STUFF!

>> To celebrate the upcoming release of the Hitman movie (only in cinemas November 22) and Kane & Lynch developed by the creators of Hitman, Atari and 20th Century Fox have been good enough to give us 5 pretty sweet Hitman/Kane & Lynch prize packs to giveaway.

Each prize pack consists of:

1 Copy of the Hitman Triple Pack on PS2
1 Copy of Kane & Lynch on PS3
1 Double Pass to see Hitman

All you need to do for a chance to win one of these kick arse prize packs is answer the following question: **Who do you think is the greatest filmic hitman of all time and why?**

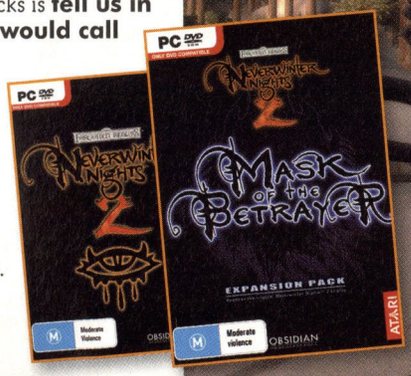


Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Scaramanga and Co, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

WIN NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: MASK OF THE BETRAYER FOR PC!

>> Neverwinter Nights 2 was rad, full of great characters and enough plot twists to keep M. Night Shyamalan happy. Now, thanks to the kind people at Atari, we have 5 prize packs consisting of Neverwinter Nights 2 and the expansion pack, Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer to give away. If you're a fan of PC RPGs then you need to enter this competition – it's as simple as that.

All you need to do for a chance to win one of these Neverwinter Nights prize packs is **tell us in 50 words or less what you would call your character and why?**



Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Modified d20 System, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

Terms & Conditions: 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am October 2, 2007 and entries close at 6pm November 14, 2007. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am November 15, 2007 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners names will be published in the October issue of Hyper on sale November 7, 2007. 9) 15 Winners will receive Crash of the Titans for Xbox 360 and a Crash Rubik's Cube (RRP: $100.00). Total competition value $1500. 20 winners will each receive one double pass to see 30 Days of Night (RRP: $31.00). Total value of the competition is $620.00. 5 winners will receive a Hitman/Kane & Lynch Prize Pack (RRP: $200). Total value of the competition is: $1000.00. 5 winners will receive a Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer Prize Pack (RRP: $133.90). Total competition value $699.50. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

24 SEASON 6

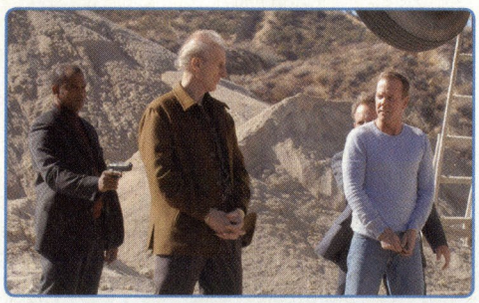
FOX, MA 15+

24 season 6 is a show all about patriots. Every character in the season does what they think is best for their respective countries and the resultant friction makes for some wonderfully compelling viewing. As has been the habit of 24 throughout the 5 previous seasons, 24 Season 6 escalates the action. Although the idea of a nuclear weapon being detonated on American soil has played a part in a previous season but Season 6 ups the ante with a bomb being detonated in a populated area within the first few episodes. It's going to be hard to top that in the inevitable season 7. Tense though it may be, Season 6 requires more suspension of disbelief than any other season of 24. IF you've been following the series, Jack Bauer was captured by Chinese agents at the end of the last season and was spirited away for torture. Season 6 sees the return of Jack, traded with the Chinese for some unspecified ransom. That's all well and good but within fifteen minutes of being back on US soil – after two years of not speaking a word and being tortured mercilessly, as evidenced by the staggering number of scars that now criss-cross his body – Jack is back chasing down terrorists and barking orders to all and sundry. There are some nice character touches, such as Jack not being able to torture a suspect for information as the whole thing is still a little to raw for him, but by and large he's the same Jack as ever, making for some rather tenuously believable action.

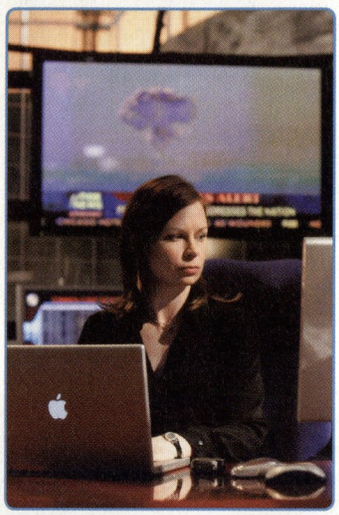
Honestly though, believability has never really been a strong suit for 24, it's just that season 6 seems to have the weakest grip on reality so far. Still the 24 episodes barrel along as a fantastic pace and even the dullest moment contain more action and scenery chewing than nearly any other show on the idiot box. We can't wait to see how they try to top themselves in season 7.

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: 7

"Dude! You were awesome in Robocop!"



That'll do pig. That'll do.



An early, discarded design for Gordon Freeman

Princess

MADMAN, MA 15+

Princess is a relentlessly disturbing and incredibly angry but remarkably effective Danish psychological drama rendered with a beautiful mixture of animation and live action. Telling the story of August, a clergyman, returning from missionary work to care for his 5 year old niece, Mia, after his sister, a porn star who worked under the name of "The Princess" dies of a drug overdose. Although the relationship starts very cautiously, August and Mia slowly warm to each other, but this burgeoning relationship heralds the beginning of the end and August realizes that Mia has been abused by her mother's friends. Incensed, he begins a crusade against the porn industry and the men responsible, striving to wipe out all of the porn in which his sister appeared and the men responsible for abusing Mia.

For the most part Princess uses animation to tell the story, the simple characters and animation helping to distance the viewer from the rather grotesque subject matter but to add the human element, director Anders Morgenthaler utilizes live action in flashbacks, with the same actors as provide the voices for the animated characters. The overall effect is rather brutally manipulative – giving the viewer distance during the animation but sucking them back in with the often incredibly downbeat live action flashbacks.

Whether or not you will appreciate – it is a difficult film to enjoy - Princess comes down to a few key factors; whether you can stomach a film about an abused child that rarely pulls any punches, if you can tolerate bursts of brutal, unglamourised violence and whether or not you can accept all this in animated form.

FILM: 9 / FEATURES: 1

"Who put sauce on this guy's face?"

PRINCESS © 2007 ZENTROPA GRRRR APS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

WIN SOME AWESOME 28 WEEKS LATER STUFF!

>> Zombies, London, gore, Rose Byrne – there's four good reasons right there to watch 28 Weeks Later, the long awaited sequel to Danny Boyle's brilliant re-imagining of the zombie genre. Set 28 weeks after the initial outbreak (quite a handy coincidence – if it was set one week earlier the title 27 Weeks Later would just sound silly), Later tells the story of two children in a supposed safe zone on the Isle of Dogs. Naturally everything goes pear shaped and the Rage virus isn't as over as people would like to think. Cue zombie goodness.

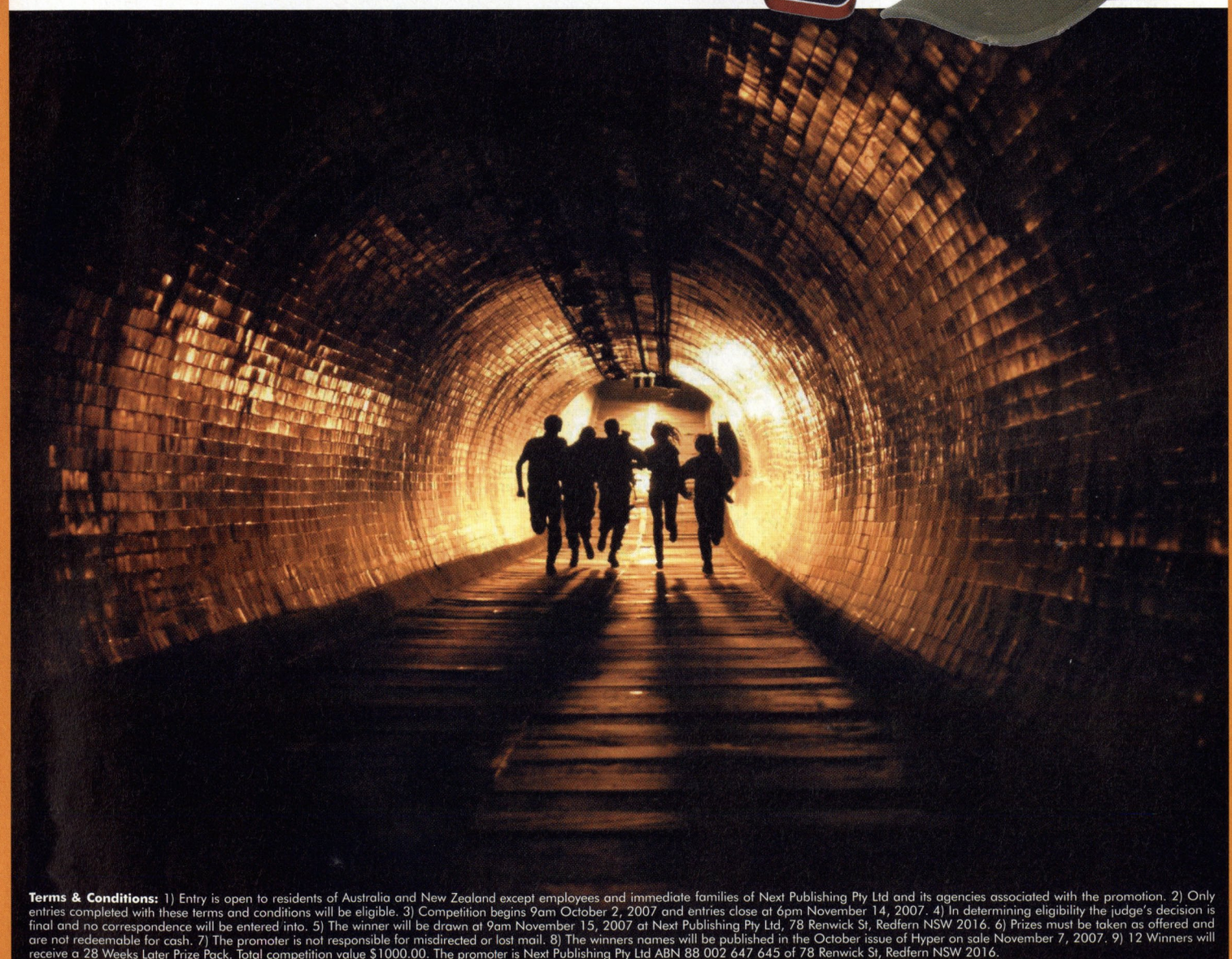
All you need to do for a chance to win one of these awesome prize packs is a**nswer the following question in 50 words or less: How will you survive the inevitable zombie apocalypse?**

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

1 EXTRA LUCKY WINNER WILL RECEIVE - signed 28 Days Later poster by Danny Boyle and screenplay by Danny Boyle and Alex Garland, major horror pack including 10 horror titles

1 RUNNER UP WILL RECEIVE - signed 28 Days Later poster by Danny Boyle and horror pack including 28 Days Later and 28 Weeks Later

10 RUNNERS UP WILL RECEIVE - 28 Weeks Later DVD



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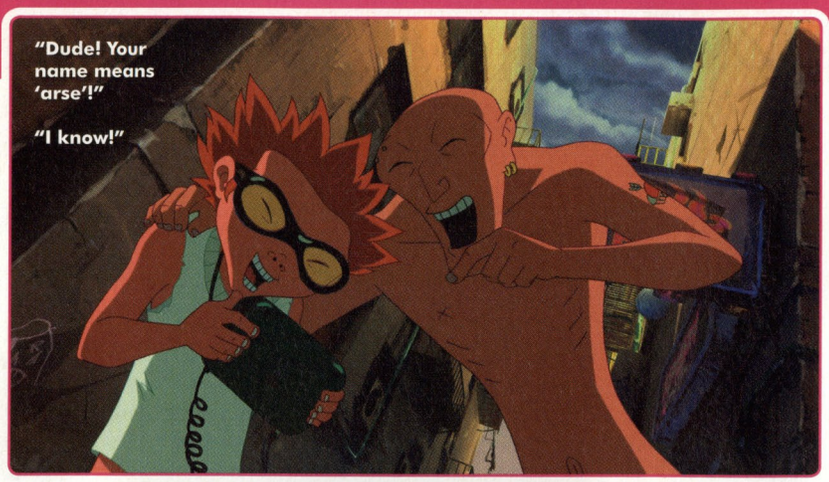
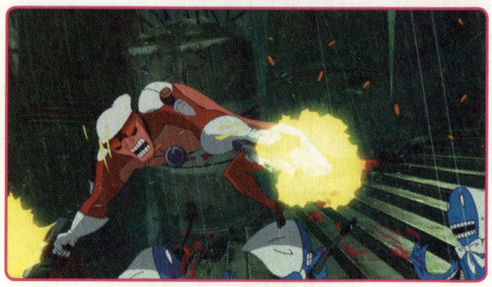
Aachi & Ssipak

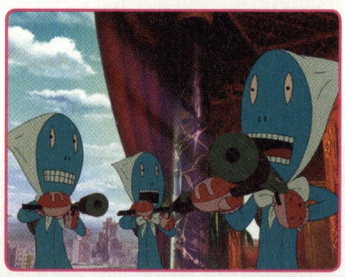
PRODUCTION: J TEAM
GENRE: ACTION COMEDY



Aachi means "bum" (as in arse, not the homeless kind) in Korean, and Ssipak is an expletive. This should give you a little hint as to what to expect from Aachi and Ssipak, a thoroughly insane, bizarre, crude, base and thoroughly entertaining animated film from South Korea. To sum it up briefly, Aachi and Ssipak is the story of the two titular hooligans, a gang of mutants unable to take a crap, a porn-star called Beautiful, a washed up porn director, an evil big headed dictator and a super-soldier that looks like someone has crossed the Terminator with Roger Ramjet. They all live in a future society in which human waste is the only viable form of energy left. At birth citizens are fitted with an anal chip that monitors all defecation and rewards the citizen with an addictive, drug laced candy called a "Juicy Bar" every time they take a dump. "Juicy Bars" are so addictive there is a thriving black-market for them. When Beautiful is fitted with multiple anal chips she becomes a virtual black-market goldmine as every time she goes to the bathroom she is rewarded with hundreds of "Juicy Bars". As a result, everyone wants her – the government to find out why she gets so many "Juicy Bars", the Diaper Gang wants her because they are hopelessly addicted to the bars (responsible for mutating them int eh first place) and they can't shit themselves and Aachi & Ssipak want her, Aachi because he wants to get rich and Ssipak because he's in love. It all moves with the speed of a well told fart joke. The animation is superlative, combining brilliant 2D, reminiscent of Gendy Tartakovsky's work on Samurai Jack (though far less angular) and meticulously rendered 3D backgrounds. The word bizarre doesn't do Aachi & Ssipak justice.

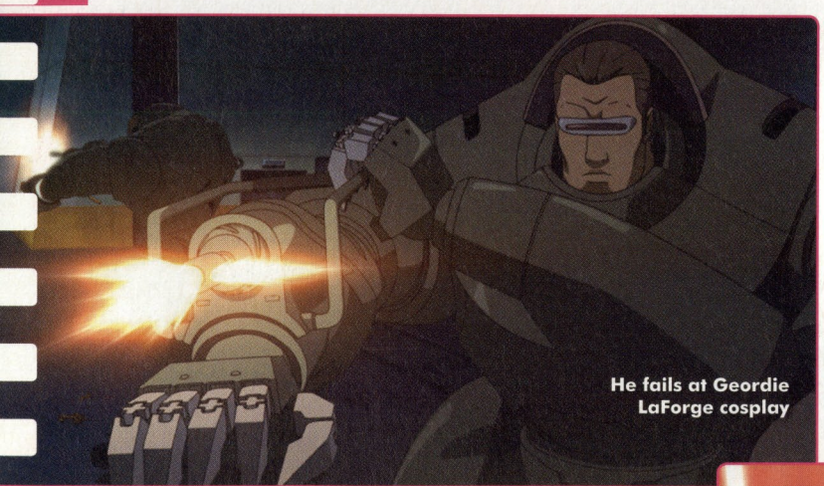
The horrors of collagen injections





ANIMATION: 10 / STORY: 6
EXTRAS: 5 / **OVERALL: 8**

AACHI & SSIPAK © STUDIO 2.0, SOUTH KOREA, 2006



He fails at Geordie LaForge cosplay

Ghost in the Shell:
SOLID STATE SOCIETY

PRODUCTION: PRODUCTION IG
GENRE: CYBERPUNK

Falling somewhere between the fast paced brilliance of the original Ghost in the Shell and the slow, thoughtful (and somewhat muddled) Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, Solid State Society takes its basis from the Stand Alone Complex anime series, telling the story of Section 9 two years after Major Kusanagi transcends the mortal realm and becomes one with the net. Telling the story of aged terrorist leaders, missing bio-weapons, missing children and a mysterious "super wizard class" hacker known as "The Puppeteer", Solid State Society often feels a little too muddled and aimless to fully keep the viewer's attention, especially during the slow opening 45 of so minutes, as Section 9 goes on with what appears to be busy-work; chasing down leads that go nowhere, having interpersonal tiffs that result in nothing and generally getting on with their days. When the plot does kick in at around the half way mark things hot up immensely with some very satisfying plot conclusions and a rather spectacular battle sequence between Section 9 and their Think Tanks and some security androids. While the story may leave a little something to be desired in terms of pacing and cohesion, the animation is wonderful throughout, combining excellent character design with wonderfully detailed backgrounds. Unlike the more high profile Ghost in the Shell films, Solid State Society doesn't utilize the technique of placing 2D characters in front of meticulously rendered, always stunning digitally generated backgrounds. Whilst this does make the film a little less spectacular than its predecessors, the more uniform animation style gives the story a more grounded feel.

Dead guy - he's no Kusanagi

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

GHOST IN THE SHELL: SOLID STATE SOCIETY © 2006-2007 SHIROW MASAMUNE - PRODUCTION I.G / KODANSHA

Tom Goes To The Mayor

PRODUCTION: CARTOON NETWORK
GENRE: COMEDY

Focussing on the misadventures of Tom Peters, an average guy who's "full of ideas", and the scatterbrained and bumbling Mayor of a town called Jefferton, Tom Goes To The Mayor is yet another pretty damn funny Cartoon Network animation to come under the Adult Swim banner.

The general gist of the show is that every episode Tom comes to the Mayor with an awful idea to help the town, and in turn the Mayor will take Tom's awful idea and turn it into a disaster that invariably ends up ruining Tom's life.

This leads into all kinds of consistently bizarre storylines involving such plots as Tom and the Mayor filling Jefferton with bear traps to "scare the children safe", or spending the entire town's school funding on a WWII themed entertainment restaurant (which includes a doo-wop singing Hitler) and organising a public holiday so they can marry all of the town's dogs.

The bizarre premise and stories are complimented by some unique animation, or lack thereof as the case may be. Instead of animation, Tom Goes To The Mayor is made from still photographs of the voice cast that have been made to look like they've been run through a fax machine. The characters move only to change from one exaggerated expression to the next, with the resultant effect being enough to draw a laugh, even before the characters open their mouths. The show even includes a variety of randomly inserted live-action sketches, adding to the show's eclectic style.

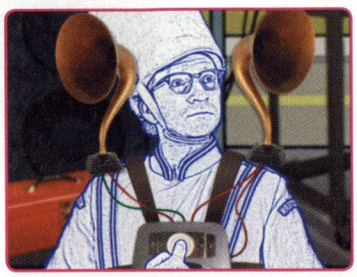
In the first few episodes alone the show even manages to have cameo performances from Tenacious D's Jack Black and Kyle Gas, who appear as a pair of all-singing, all-dancing bear-trap manufacturers, as well as Jeff Goldblum as a pet shop owner, Brian Posehn as a clingy midget who ends up down a well, and many more.

The combination of laughs and weirdness ensures that Tom Goes To The Mayor is yet another win for Adult Swim.

ANIMATION: 5 / STORY: 8
EXTRAS: TBA / **OVERALL: 8**

"Two kings!"

It's like a scene from Ravenous - only funny



TOM GOES TO THE MAYOR © 2007 CARTOON NETWORK.

Mushi-Shi

PRODUCTION: KONDANSHA/ FUNIMATION
GENRE: FANTASY

Mushi-Shi is a kind of fantasy ghost story set in a fictional ancient Japan. In this fantasy world exists a primitive and mystical life-form known as the Mushi, a species described as being "life in its purest form". These ghost-like creatures are invisible to most people and can take any shape they please, including human form, and although they are not strictly evil, they are capable of causing plenty of mischief for real humans, or even harming them.

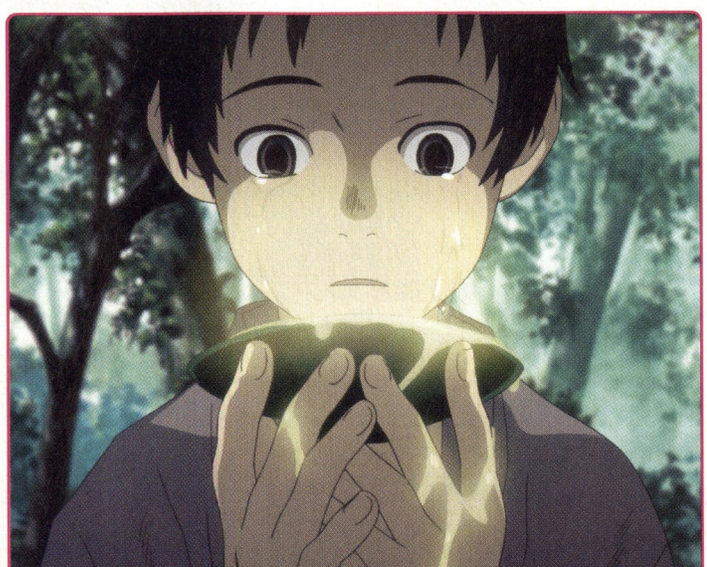
The story of Mushi-Shi focuses on Ginko, a self-proclaimed Mushi-master. Ginko walks the Earth, travelling from place to place rescuing or protecting humans who have fallen afoul of the Mushi.

With a premise involving ancient ghosts and a roving hero, you may expect Mushi-Shi to be filled with spectacular ghost-versus-man battle sequences, however, you would be wrong. Ginko is more of an occult detective than a fighter, and more often than not his solutions to a mushi/human conflict are far more intriguing than any generic battle sequence could hope to be.

Each episode of Mushi-Shi takes a monster of the week approach and there is really no overarching story, with the only recurring character being Ginko himself. You do slowly learn a little more about Ginko, but in general Mushi-Shi simply tackles a new problem for a new set of characters each episode, something that is quite refreshing, especially considering how good the story of each episode is.

The animation is excellent, although there is a strange tendency for the animators to not draw in the faces of characters whenever the viewpoint is switched to a wide shot. As a result there are plenty of silly-looking scenes in this anime where faceless characters are holding a conversation with each other. Nevertheless, Mushi-Shi is still an incredible anime.

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 9
EXTRAS: TBA / **OVERALL: 9**



A bowl of delicious emo tears

The results of too much emo crying

MUSHISHI © YUKI URUSHIBARA / KODANSHA MUSHI-SHI PARTNERSHIP.

COLLECTIONS

BY ERIN MARCON

Here's a question for you. What was the first gaming platform owned by Neversoft luminary Brian Bright? Go on, have a guess. Was it the ubiquitous Atari 2600? Perhaps the Intellivision or Commodore Vic-20 caught the young man's eye? Here's a hint. You're thinking too mainstream. Before you ask, let's scratch the Odyssey, ColecoVision and Vectrex off the list as well. These contenders, obscure as they may seem, are much more celebrated than the system in question. Give up?

The Interact Family Computer (IFC) was released in 1979, shipping with two joysticks and a tape drive that Bright describes as "sweet". By all accounts, only a few thousand units found their way onto the market. Given the modest retail performance of the system, a surprisingly broad range of software was produced, including games such as 'Dogfight', 'Star Track' and 'Hangman'.

Bright soon moved on to the Commodore 64. The beige box became his primary gaming outlet and he amassed a vast library of titles over the next few years. "I still have all my original C64 floppies," he says.

Like many young gamers during this era, he became adept at copying games. Third party programs enabled home users to circumvent copy-protection measures and he happily recalls employing the 'Disector' program to create discs of 10 or more titles.

Bright's fondest gaming memories relate to his collection of first person shooters. "I love twitch games," he says.

During the 1990's, he devoted himself to the work of id Software. The creators of 'Wolfenstein 3D' and 'Doom' had already established themselves as a genre heavyweight when they unleashed what was to become Bright's series of choice. 'Quake' impressed Bright with its control scheme and physics. It made him "feel like a superhero".

"Quake III is my favourite game of all time," he enthuses.

"I'm highly competitive and have logged more hours playing that than any other game (except Tony Hawk)."

In recent years, Bright has rediscovered titles such as 'Pac-Man' and 'Galaga' via the Xbox Live Arcade. "They were bare boned, but designed and balanced to perfection," he says.

"Simple games really reside at the core of all modern design decisions."

Today, most of Bright's games are stored in what can only be described as a 'treasure chamber' beneath his home. What becomes of games deemed unworthy of inclusion in the chamber?

"I use games I don't like as coasters for my beer."

We would like to thank Brian Bright for participating in this month's column. Join us next time as we delve into the collection of Creative Assembly designer (and Hyper legend) Dan Toose!

Meet Brian Bright

Brian Bright is the joint project director of Neversoft's 'Tony Hawk' franchise. He is currently hard at work on the latest iteration of the skateboarding series, a multi-platform release that promises to add eight new features to the mix. "Tony Hawk's Proving Ground is the biggest game we've ever made at Neversoft," he says.

Tony Hawk's Proving Ground

Cataloguing the classics

After watching Bright depart for work one morning, we broke into his house and rifled through his collection.

1. *Archon: The Light and the Dark*
Free Fall's 1983 hybrid of brawling and strategy for the C64 catered to both chess nerds and the kids who harassed them for their lunch money.

2. *The Bard's Tale*
Released for the C64 in 1985, Interplay's RPG informed some of Bright's views on character development.

3. *Beach Head*
Why go to the beach when Access Software's 1983 classic allows you to frolic in the sand and surf on your C64? Don't forget your sunscreen (or your heavy artillery).

4. *Call of Duty*
Powered by the 'Quake III' engine, Infinity Ward's PC shooter arrived in 2003. Bright remains enamoured with the "multiplayer intensity" of this WWII classic.

5. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*
Despite adhering closely to genre conventions, Bethesda Softworks' 2006 role-playing epic was universally praised. Just don't mention the horse armour.

6. *Katamari Damacy*
This colourful PS2 title kick-started the rolling adhesive ball genre back in 2004. It also prompted Namco to introduce random drug testing of all employees.

7. *M.U.L.E*
Ozark Software's trailblazing resource management sim for the C64 achieved cult status in 1983.

8. *Quake III: Arena*
The success of this 1999 FPS proved that millions of gamers would rather slaughter each other than compete against AI.

9. *Raid on Bungeling Bay*
Designed by industry icon Will ('The Sims') Wright, this 1987 shooter for the C64 proved that Wright once valued wanton carnage as highly as social networking.

10. *Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness*
Origin Systems' legendary 1986 RPG spawned more than a dozen sequels. Child experts agree that first age of darkness is actually 13.

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The WOW Chronicles

All things must pass. All things must end.

» JackTheGrin

I think that I've run out of things to say about World of Warcraft. I've been all the way through to level 70. I've seen all the good Instances and gone raiding with the best of them. Plus this Lich King thing, well, it just drives a man insane. I think about grinding it out to level 80 and start hurtling my head towards my desk in open despair. I just can't do it. Everyone else seems really excited by it but I just don't have the courage. I really don't.

Closing my account, even now, is a daunting task. Looking over all my characters, thinking of all the stuff we've been through together. ElBastardo, the paladin who I now see was the most boring possible character I could have ever picked. Grinning, the mage with talents points seemingly distributed at random by a monkey with syphilis and a crystal meth addiction. And lovely, lovely Jack the Grin, the character I finally learned how to play the game with. "I'll miss you most of all."

Warcrack, they call it and an addiction it is, make no mistake. I start getting twitchy when I start to thinking about the sad fact that I'll never take out Illidan. Or be one of those players who leaps effortlessly from 70 to 80, dispensing wisdom at every go. Really, though, it's ok. I'll somehow survive. I'll miss the friends I've made in the game and I'll miss giddy thrill of NEW CONTENT! Really, though, I do have a kind of 'been there done that' feeling when it comes to the game now.

And I want to play something with no poncy elves. Man, do I hate them elves.

Damn! Even as I'm typing this, I'm feeling the urge to log on. I may get the shakes.

So anyway, thanks to Bonkers. Thanks to Bonehunter and Djani and all the other crew who've helped out. Thanks to everyone whose said hello during the game as well. You're gentles and scholars all. If I could leave you all with one word of wisdom from two years of playing the game, it's this: please be nicer to each other. Manners, people. Manner.

Anyway, I'm off to another monthly column. Word is the column is off to new hands. Ask the new kid about 'punching the pig' one time. Sadly, it's not a metaphor.

Have fun, everyone. Dig on the new release, keep up the grind. I'll be off playing something with some goddamn machine guns.

No, I'm not sending you my gold.

GAME ON

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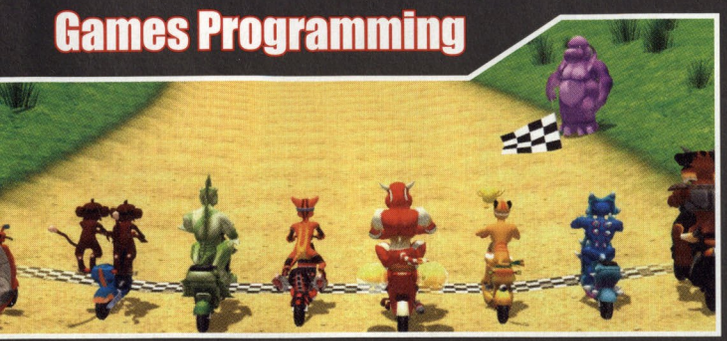
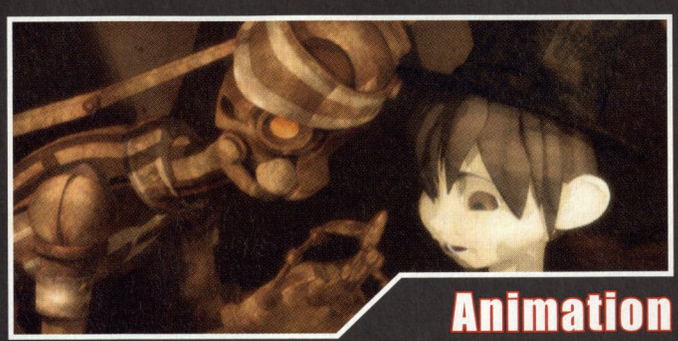
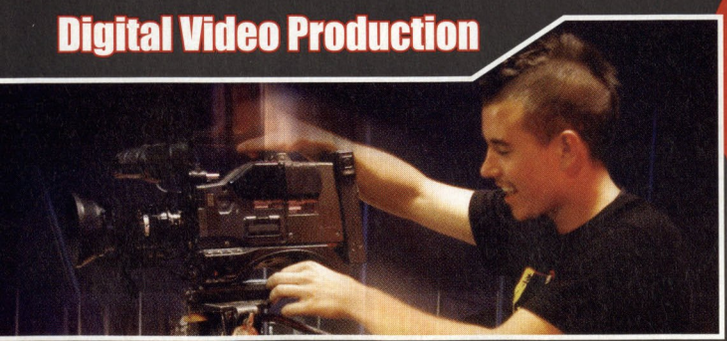
Games Programming





Animation

Digital Video Production



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hotseat

Developers answer your questions about stuff

THIS MONTH: Free Radical's Screenwriter Rob Yescombe on Haze

FREE RADICAL

Jickle

Free Radical's previous games are Timesplitters 1, 2 and 3 and Second Sight. While it's great to hone something you're clearly good at, will we be seeing any non-FPS efforts from Free Radical this gen?

Well, actually Second Sight was third person – but I hope you don't lose your love for FPSs, because we're working on THREE right now: Haze, TimeSplitters 4, and the 'top secret' LucasArts project. I'm sure we'll have a crack at a non-FPS title in due course, but right now we've got our work cut out for us.

Squato

Some of the guys who founded the company used to work for Rare while they had been making the Goldeneye game for the Nintendo 64. Is Free Radical thinking about taking on the Bond licence at some point in the future? And if so, would you try to relive the type of gameplay which Goldeneye and Everything Or Nothing is renowned for? Forge your own path with it? Or try to do something with all three in mind?

Actually, we'd love to get the Bond license, but it simply hasn't been offered to us. You'd think it would be a bit of a no-brainer. As to what we'd do with it, I expect there would be a little self-reference, but we've got some very exciting theoretical ideas locked up in the vault.

Texta

Haze's plot sounds quite political. Are you actually trying to make a statement with this game and do you think there is room for political activism in the video game medium?

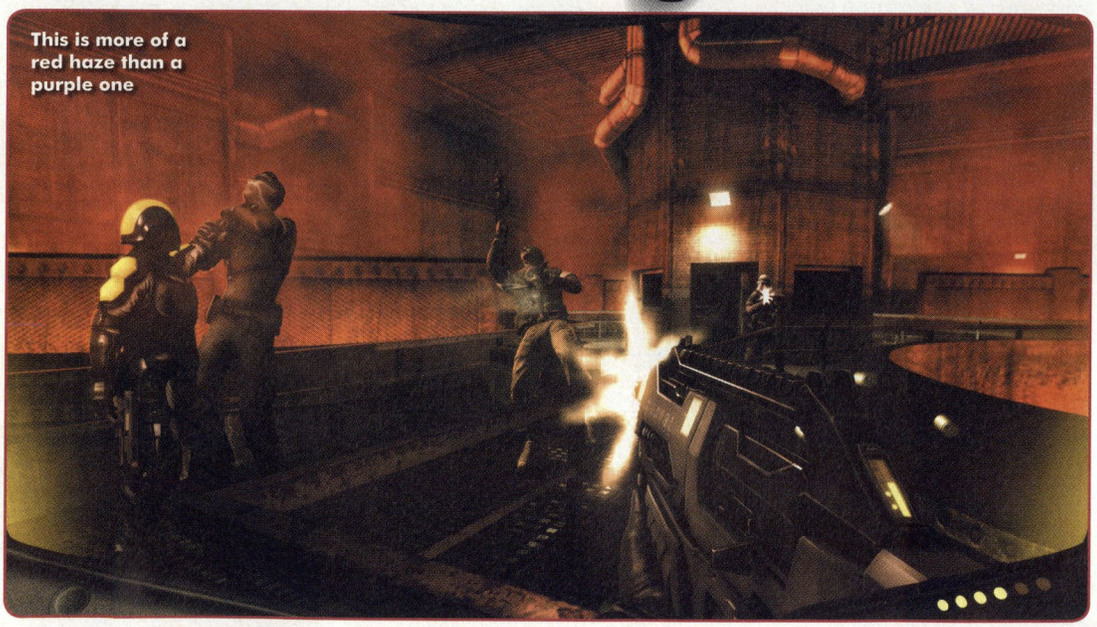
It's a difficult topic. Ultimately, games are like cartoons, and by proxy their opinions are tainted by the medium. They're still seen as a little bit childish. But then, people said the same thing about The Simpsons. The main problem with activism in games is that the product needs to meet a certain level of playability before anyone will listen to it. Guerrilla film-making can get away with cheap-looking production and still get its message across, but a game can't really do that and expect to be taken seriously. The flip-side, of course, is that for the product to look and play better, more money needs to be spent on it, and the more expensive it is the more risky it is to talk politics, because the game needs to make its money back.

I ain't got time to bleed

UKG

In this era of scrutiny about Performance enhancing Drugs or Drugs of any kind in any field, are you worried about the opinions of the righteous stating that it is giving the wrong message to kids about using them? War is wrong but War whilst on drugs is just plainly WRONG. The idea of being able to enhance your killing by drug use should flag some attention by the narrow minded people who don't understand its a game.

Well, actually, Nectar turns out to be a very evil thing, with no moral upside, AND it will eventually kill you. So, I doubt that could be seen as glamorising drugs. Sure it enhances your killing ability – but killing is painted as being a poor solution to a problem.



This is more of a red haze than a purple one

Citizen Erased

What's going to set this game apart from every other FPS on the market , not another game with bullet time/ slow mo powers again ?

Well, apart from four player co-op; narrative-based story assault maps for 24 players online; a completely new asymmetric combat system between two very different factions; the unique Nectar system; individual skills and weapon sets for both Mantel and The Promise Hand; a fully-steaming game with no loading screens and the best-looking graphics out there, I'd say we've got nothing. Oh, and there's no bullet time.

Sheeps

Will Haze have extra single player components other than story mode to keep the replay-ability up to a good standard, ie. the arcade/challenge modes in the Timesplitters series?

It won't have challenge modes like TimeSplitters, but you can expect some really tough extra difficulty modes, as well as the four player co-op, which I think is a pretty big deal.

Surgeon

The Nectar system seems to be one of the games main selling points in single and multiplayer. Could you explain why it's going to be something unique and interesting rather than just a tacked on feature?

In the first half of the game, as a Mantel trooper, it's all about taking enough nectar in order to fight better. But if you take too much, you'll OVERDOSE. When you're Overdosing, you'll go nuts and start shooting your squad uncontrollably – which is bad. But, when you switch sides and play as a Promise Hand rebel, it's all about forcing the Mantel troopers to Overdose.

Y'see, as a Mantel guy, Nectar is your best weapon because it makes you tougher and faster, and gives you a bunch of extra abilities. But as a rebel, Nectar is your best weapon against Mantel, because you can make them Overdose.

The whole combat system, in single AND multiplayer AND co-op is based around the use and abuse of Nectar. I assure you, my good man, it's not tacked on.

Sheeps

The talk about exclusivity of this game has been thrown all over the place. Is it truly exclusive to PS3 now or is it really a timed exclusive? If the former, do you not think that you will be losing a large audience of PC gamers who are looking for a shooter besides Crysis that will provide something decent (and possibly more easily playable on a general PC than Crysis due to system requirements)?

Right now, all we know is that it's a PS3 exclusive.

Hyperactive

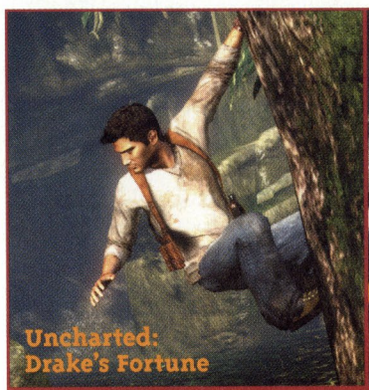
With your previous titles, a strong focus has been placed on the multiplayer aspect of gameplay with the single player experience being rather lacking. So what was the reason that drove you guys to improve this side of the game and the implementation of the sadly to say - the currently underused co-op feature within the game? (Btw - 4 player co-op sounds awesome)

To be perfectly honest, the reason we've decided to gun for a great single player campaign along side the co-op and multiplayer is because folks like you told us that this was somewhere where you thought we were lacking. You see? We listen! (By the way, the co-op IS awesome!)

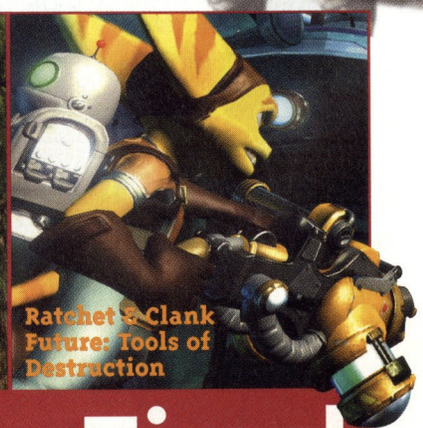
Scoz

Seeing free radical jump from the for fast fun Timesplitters to Haze, which actually seems to take itself seriously is quite unexpected. Do you have any worries that the game might sacrifice the level of fun seen in TS3 for realism (though I know many think that realism IS fun...)?

Plenty of games are fun without being realistic, and plenty are fun whilst being realistic, so I don't think that's really a factor. We have a great team of designers who understand that, and know how to take something that takes itself seriously, and make sure hat it's fun. As for why we chose this way - the story we wanted to tell in Haze simply didn't suit a cartoonish art style. But don't worry, because TimeSplitters 4 is coming soon.



Uncharted: Drake's Fortune



Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction

QuestionTime!

It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month in the Hot Seat sits Naugty Dog and Insomniac Studios, developers of the hugely anticipated Uncharted: Drake's Fortune and Ratchet & Clank Future (respectively) for PS3. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to Jade and Patrice. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

Questions can be sent to: *hotseat@next.com.au*

Questions can be posted in the Hot Seat area of the Hyperactive forums *http://forums.hyperactive.com.au/*

MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:
78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW
2016 Australia

EMAIL:
freakscene@next.com.au

LETTER OF THE MONTH!

The T-Shirt of Mystery - it's like a mithril shirt for real geeks, not pervy Hobbit fanciers, protecting you from the blows and barbs of the unwashed masses.

★★Letter of the Month!★★
BIOSHOCK HYPE

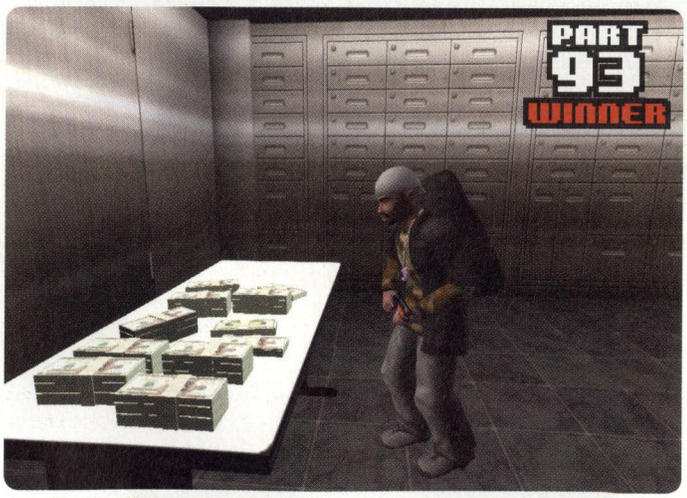
I just thought I'd write in and let Australia now about my impression and experience with possibly the most hyped game of all time, Bioshock. Having not gone into the future and read Hyper's review of the game (the DeLorean is in the workshop at the moment), I am not privy to what you guys thought of the game. As a precursor to the rest of this email, I am writing to say how good I think it is, and how this is one example of hype working in the favour of a game.

Bioshock has impressed me to no end for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Bioshock is one of the least frustrating games that I have ever played. The idea that everything you do has a lasting effect on the world, even if you die, is a breath of fresh air in a world of save points and mid level check points. It doesn't rely on artificial difficulty to challenge the gamer, but instead the game itself provides the gamer with an experience that will put all of your skills to the test, not just your patience. The setting is so different and dynamic that you get so immersed in a world that has literally begun to swallow its own existence. Hearing radio diaries of the citizens of Rapture and their day-to-day struggle with Adam and Rapture is on a par with most Hollywood movies for storytelling.

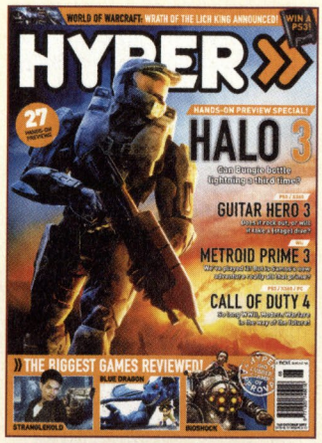
My next point is choice. Choice is the ever-present carrot dangling in front of gamers that so many companies promise but so few deliver. Choice is not just a choose-your-own-adventure style "should I go left or right" mechanic, it is a freedom that says the gamer can

CAPTION THIS!

Yuri Ramsey has obviously been following the sales charts... now, if only his last name was "Spadeface".



After finally breaking into Sony's vault, expecting a mountain of cash, Bill discovered the truth about the PS3's profits...



HYPER 168 FEEDBACK

Feedback here! Come and get yer feedback!

Camb3h
I really enjoyed the hands-on feature and the art style for that was well done. The location of what system each was on wasn't always clear but you could simply read the information box to find out so no problem.

Also, thanks for the heavenly sword review. There had been a lot thrown around the interwebs with some being really low and some being high but as usual I can only trust hyper's score. Mainly because its what I'm familiar with so I instantly know the type of game I'd be playing based off the review.

scoz
Great issue guys. This one had MAJOR SUBSTANCE!!! Hands on section great. You guys really came over as dissapointed when I scanned the Metroid 3 section though. I was especially worried with the negative attention grabbing quote "the other bounty hunters seem a poor fit for metroid..."

Hmm. I hope it doesn't end up in the "looked good but isn't bin". Like Jericho.

the_watchers_eye
[On the review score issue] honestly, I like it the way it is. No game is ever going to be perfect, and the review system should reflect that - and Hyper's does. I find a review set up like PCPP doesn't give me enough information.

Mr_M
Bioshock: is it really that good or did you just pump up the score so people will "buy it and justify Irrational's design choices"?

TAT
Only someone who hasn't played Bioshock would say something like that!

Adios
Am I the only person to notice how many typo's were in the issue? There was far more than usual, littered all over the place.

Daniel
It's like we include a free puzzle game with every issue.

Seriously though, long, tough issue. Mea culpa.

ireadtabloids
I may be spouting rubbish, but I'm sick of Halo covers appearing every time you have new information on it.

Ryan Hayward
Just recieved it today and kinda all giddy about the Ratchet & Clank preview.

The eyecandy of that baby...

Marcu
After not reading Hyper for a few months, I picked it up today soley for the Bioshock review, and I am happily surprised at how much the magazine has improved since I last read it. You guys have seemed to drop a lot of the silly humor you had all over the mag and instead replaced it with news and good reviews. You've regained a reader!

losturtle
Really, I don't see why anyone would need a score out of 100. Ever.

It might reflect their view but there's no such thing as accurately scoring a game so closely to the 1/100th. There are so many variables that affect the enjoyment of a game for anyone that it's simply not going to matter whether a game has an 82 or an 89 unless you can't think for yourself and need to rely solely on someone's opinion to make decisions. Arguably films have just as many variables as games (I'd say more due to the medium being more accepted) and you'll never see one reviewed out of 100.

beast
Maybe you guys could get rid of the review, and just publish a list of games with scores next to them.

In reality I agree that the score isn't very important... I think leaving it the same is fine.

do whatever you want to complete a section or challenge. Bioshock provides this. Hypnotising Big Daddies to fight other Big Daddies, using telekinesis to provide a shield before downing the enemy with it or just freezing a splicer before wrenching him to death are real options; options that aren't outlined in an instruction manual or tutorial.

Anyway, you get the message that I love this game. Do yourself a favour 360 and PC owners, buy this game and play it through at least once. And I hope that it may eventually get released on PS3 so that they too can experience one of video gaming's finest moments. Hype can be a bad thing, but if it gets more people to play this game, I'm all for it. Congrats on the mag, I'm off to finish the game.

Travis Dark

Hype can be a dangerous thing, Travis, but we should all remember that occasionally a game comes along that not only meets its hype, but positively thrashes it. Bioshock is one of those games.

For all of the reasons you mention, and plenty more besides, Bioshock is conceptually brilliant, visually inspired, and has a story and game design that is utterly compelling from start to finish.

As we said in our review, Bioshock isn't perfect, but it gets so many things so very right that it has already managed to become an instant classic, and subsequently, one of our favourite games of the year.

While the possibility of there being a PS3 version is still very much up in the air, we agree that PC and Xbox 360 owners should do themselves a favour and play it at least more than once. With two endings and a multitude of ways to approach the game, Bioshock is too good not to come back for seconds.

JUDGE GRAPHICS

I'm sick and tired of people judging games by the way they look. These days someone might only like a game because it's visually outstanding but not because of the game play. Games should not be judged this way. In the eighties no game was really visually outstanding but many games stood out because of their fun and well thought out game play. I think more games should be judged this way. I mean, come on, who cares about the way the game looks it's the way it plays out. Good visuals are just a bonus. So please, I hope you don't judge any games on this, like some people I know do.

Beau Krstevski

We can assure you in no uncertain terms, Beau, that Hyper definitely does not judge a game's overall worth based solely on is graphical prowess.

Videogames are of course a multimedia medium, and visuals make up a large proportion of a game. The visual appeal of a game is always going to be an important factor in a game's development, however, graphics are neither the only, nor the most important, factor to take into consideration when evaluating a game's quality.

One of our favourite examples of this is Tetris. If there was ever a candidate that is deserving of the award of being a "perfect" game, then Alexey Pajitnov's tetrominoid puzzler is it. However, looking at Tetris from a purely visual standpoint would be an extremely disappointing experience. As functional as multicoloured tetrominoes may be, they certainly don't make for thrilling graphics.

This theory doesn't just hold true for simple puzzle games though, but it holds true for every conceivable genre on every platform ever made. For Hyper, gameplay is what really makes a game. That's the way it's always been, and that's how it will always be – we guarantee it!

PRICK SYNDROME

What has become of online gaming? Honestly? It seems to me that the scum of the Earth just happens to be lying within the depths of online gaming. I don't know what's become of it. I remember reading in an issue quite some time ago (it may of been one or even two years ago) where this guy (the bloke writing the letter) was talking about how people behave differently online, specifically in online games. I also remember your responses to it was along the lines that since people can remain anonymous online, they feel they can simply do and say whatever they please. Now this pisses me off. Common courtesy is pretty much thrown out the window when it comes to the Internet, in exchange for selfishness, rudeness and general arrogance (e.g. prick syndrome).

One of the greatest examples (of people acting like pricks in games) in online games is Battlefield 2 for the PS2. I got it for Christmas back in 2005, and got it specifically for online play. I played with my friends from time to time and with them it was a lot of fun, but with people I didn't know it got freaky, almost to the levels of Tom Cruise and Scientology. One time I was playing a Capture the Flag game, and for some reason every time I got close to our flag with the enemy's flag (it was easy to capture the enemy's flag) I would always get shot down by one of my "team mates", he would run to my corpse, take the flag, and quickly put it down himself. Capturing a flag is like, worth seven points, a kill was worth one, while killing your own team mate was negative one. So either way, the guy got six points. He did it like four times in the game that I asked him over the microphone chat "Why the hell do you keep killing me "name here"?" and he replied, in his ponce British accent "Whine whine bitch bitch."

Simply amazing.

He left the game eventually, because instead of concentrating on capturing the enemy's flag or taking down enemies, I decided to shoot him whenever possible. I guess it was bad of me to sink to his level, but hey, I couldn't use the punish feature nor did anyone else say anything about it. Another thing about Battlefield 2 online (and with the PC versions as well, apparently) is how people can get so aggressive over stuff like taking vehicles and then instantly leaving all team mates behind, or using say, a helicopter as a tool of leverage (example: flying up to a building, then jumping out of the helicopter to land on top of this said building, REGARDLESS OF WHO IS LEFT INSIDE THE HELICOPTER). One time again in the PS2 version our own team was killing each other, we were losing points not only because the enemy didn't actually fight us while they collected flags, but because our own team was literally slaughtering one another in our own base. I entered the game to find over half of our team shooting up at one of our own helicopters, with a lone pilot on the inside. I asked "What the hell is going on?" and someone replied "That bastard took the chopper and isn't letting anyone go with him". Suddenly someone (I believe the chopper pilot) replied in a very loud, high pitched voice that could have been capable of piercing Chuck Norris' ear drums, and he said "THAT'S BECAUSE THIS TEAM IS FULL OF F***ING RETAAAAAAARDS!" before firing down a barrage of missiles upon us, while actually laughing and swearing through the microphone.

Devilish, I assure you.

Ever played City of Heroes? A game we all know as a massive multiplayer online game where players take the form of superheroes and join together to fight the forces of evil (vice versa if you play, or prefer City of Villains). I remember one time when I started playing it again a few months back. We had

hotseat

It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month int he Hot Seat sits the collective arses of Naughty Dog and Insomniac, developers of Uncharted: Drake's Fortune and Ratchet & Clank Future, respectively, for PS3. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to The developers. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

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this bloke on our team who was a Scrapper (melee combatant, highly excelling in melee combat to that) who refused to fight. All he would do is stand there in the background and complain, "I'm not getting enuf exp", "This is 2 hard" etc. He claimed he was a healer (because he had an Aid Other0 skill from the medicine power pool) and that he didn't fight because "I'm a healer". We told him off quite often for not actually jumping into the fight to use his CLAWS (his primary offensive power set) and he argued back "I have a lvl 25 healer". So? You're playing as a level fourteen SCRAPPER. You're not supposed to heal. You're supposed to FIGHT!

I really do hate how most people on the Internet act. Because you can't actually see the person right before your eyes, nor can you hear their voice nor do you know their name, it's as if these people think they can do and say whatever they please and get away with it, and unfortunately most of the time they do. It's also amazing how selfish these people are, they expect so much effort from their team mates yet they do nothing themselves. Whether it's Battlefield 2 or City of Heroes, it's just all the same really.

While in this letter I complain mostly about these people, there are of course people online who do have common courtesy, manners and of course, common sense. Unfortunately though from my experience, the good is severely outweighed by the bad. What're your thoughts on this Hyper?
Craig Brown.

We know how you feel Chris. Playing online can occasionally become an exercise in dodging through a minefield of irritating, frustrating and downright infuriating players who disregard the rules of the game and common courtesy all while whooping unintelligible gibberish at you through their microphone headsets.

While we find that the majority of online players are more interested in having fun than causing trouble, the anonymity of the online realm can cause some typically well-mannered people to adopt obnoxious personas, or can cause people who would be otherwise antisocial in the real world to be even worse online.

When playing online you just have to take the good with the bad. Invite a few friends that you know play well together, or make some new ones, and play online with them. Make note of particularly obnoxious players and put them on your ignore list if the game or online service provides one. Xbox Live in particular provides a great "unsporting play" report system whereby you can put people on your ignore list, and leave a black mark against their reputation.

After awhile, you may find that your games are filled with more genuine players and fewer jerks – and that's when you can really start having fun with online gaming.

Winners!

HYPER 167

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

How would you creep out Clive Barker?

"To creep out Clive Barker I would simply tell him Uwe Boll will be directing Jericho: The Movie. Actually, I think that would make him crap his pants..."
- Chris Johnson, Carindale, QLD

- Nathan Campbell, Richmond VIC
- Bennett Steer, O'Conner ACT
- David Lestani, Cleveland, QLD
- Jamie McGraw, Racecourse QLD
- Jody Tyson, Robina, QLD
- Nev Glover, Templestowe, VIC
- Roger Catania, Alexandria, NSW
- Matt Grocott, Torrens, ACT
- Glen Howard, Norman Park, QLD

AFRO SAMURAI

Name a haircut and fighting style more incongruous than Afro Samurai

"Mullet drunken boxing... wait I can see that any night at the Braddon local. Better make it: Dredlock Greco Roman Wrestling"
- Nathan Weber, Braddon, ACT

- Gary Higham, Sefton Park, SA
- Thomas Kauschke, Prospect, SA
- Maria Coleshill, Coorparoo, QLD
- Erin Garrett, Doncaster East, VIC
- Kerrie Balabaner, Coorparoo, QLD
- Cristina Masci, Warrandyte, VIC
- Jas Domenic, Birkdale, QLD
- Ivin Cantarell, New Farm, QLD
- Tom Purnell, Brisbane, QLD

RICKY PONTING 2007

What isn't cricket?

"AFL or Rugby or Bowling or..."
- Jesse Harrison, Crib Point, VIC

- Thi Trinh, Sunnybank, QLD
- Tim Paladin, Sunnybank, QLD
- Chris Andrews, Ellenbrook, WA
- Luke Eller, North Gosford, NSW
- Christopher Rosiak, Yellow Rock, NSW
- Anthony Harrap, Maida Vale, WA
- Nicole Clark, Doncaster Heights, VIC
- Sell Masterson, Newmarket, QLD
- Tim Paladin, Sunnybank, QLD
- Brigette Randell, Walkley Heights, SA

V8 SUPERCARS 3

How did Codemasters manage to fit 25 cars onto one DS cart?

"They were trying to get on Ripley's Believe It Or Not (by cramming large things into small spaces) and exceeded their own target."
- Mark Vellios, Perth, WA

- James O'Connor, O'Halloran Hill, SA
- Jesse Harrison, Crib Point, VIC
- Thomas Parry, Bendigo, VIC
- Edan Miller, Thornbury, VIC
- Seb Brown, Launceston, TAS
- Julian Ramsay, Cooks Hill, NSW
- Simon Wagner, Carindale, QLD
- Jenny Curtis, Sefton Park, SA
- Dennis Stanton, Kedron, QLD

BIOSHOCK, IRRATIONAL?

I am passionate about this issue along with a great many others. Don't get me wrong, Irrational, I am your biggest fan from way back. Heck, I am still modding Looking Glass's Dark Engine after all these years. This oversight, however, has left me utterly perplexed. It concerns the lack of graphic card support for Pixel Shader 2.0 / 2.0b (henceforth PS2.0) in your latest masterpiece, Bioshock. Admittedly, my card is starting to get a bit long in the tooth, but it still cuts an effective graphicy swathe through titles such as Stalker and more recently, Overlord, which both support PS2.0.

(This site is extremely useful for determining what can and can't be run before spending your hard earned dosh.) ***http://www.systemrequirementslab.com/referrer/srtest***

I know Bioshock was built on a modded version of the Unreal 3 engine, which works in DX9 so there's no question that PS2.0 could have been easily accommodated.

By leaving it out Irrational, you have chosen to neglect/alienate a significant percentage of your fan base. At the end of May, Steam, who is electronically distributing Bioshock, did a survey on its user base and who owned what cards. A whopping 23%, over 1/4 of all users, used ATI Radeon 9600, which is not capable of PS3.0 support and running Bioshock.

Now that I've got that big daddy off my chest I've now discovered that there may yet be hope. It's a user-made patch, and it makes the demo playable at least, though the graphics still leave a lot to be desired and it slows down the load speed to ridiculous levels. There is a whole forum dedicated to it and 5,100 petition sigs so far asking for 2K to acknowledge that this thing is a problem and to officially fix it. ***http://shadershock.tk/***

We wait with baited, briny sea breath.
Garrett's Soapbox Emporium

This certainly is an issue of concern, since we really do hate to think of anyone missing out on playing 2k Boston/Australia's (formerly Irrational) masterpiece simply because their otherwise completely adequate video card doesn't have the correct pixel shader.

We tried to get to the bottom of this matter by asking 2K Games for an official statement, but they declined to comment, so I guess all we can say conclusively is that somewhere during the game's production 2K Boston/Australia decided that Bioshock would benefit from using pixel shader 3.0 exclusively.

It seems that we may have to wait a little longer for an official explanation, let alone an official solution to the problem, but thankfully, the fan-made PS2.0 patch seems to be coming along quite nicely. It's not perfect, but with time it may become a good solution for anyone who's lumped with a Bioshock-incompatible video card.

Either that or you could just play it on an Xbox 360... it'll work every time!

GAME OVER?

Over the past few months, I just don't know what's happened... I've seem to lost nearly all my interest in games entirely, there seems to be nothing I want to play. I don't know whether its me or what, but no game that's come out in the last year has gotten me excited or anything; even games I love I just don't want to play anymore. Is there something wrong with me? I certainly think so...

I've got at least 25 games over multiple systems that I need to finish, such as Zelda: Twilight Princess (I've had since launch and I haven't even played it after a few days of getting it), Okami (Fantastic, but I never feel like playing) Final Fantasy 3,6,7,8 and 10-2 (I've almost finished nearly all and they're still my favourite games, but then I just lost interest and stopped playing; I've only ever finished 9 and 10...).

After a while I tried to find a good, fun online game to play, but I was still unsuccessful; nothing that was free to play that I downloaded (Fly for Fun, Eudemons online and more) was all that good compared to WoW, which I now regret selling to my friends for around the same amount I bought it for.

So what should I do? Try to find my lost interest of gaming? I would like to play WoW again, but alas, I have no money to BUY let alone pay per month (like $30 for the game, $50 for BC and $40 for prepaid card; and all I have at the moment is 45 bucks)

What to do? Could this be the end of playing games for me? I surely

FORUM TALK

666
EA's Skate
I'm a big fan of skating games, starting with EA's own Skate or Die on the Commodore 64, the Tony Hawk franchise was amazing at first, but has left me unhappy for many years with it's anti gravity bullshit. So this game actually looks to be based in a bit of reality, the skaters have weight & momentum to them, realistic environments and the tricks look human and satisfying. I want to do a kickflip to boardslide down a rail and have it feel like an accomplishment, and this could actually pan out doing that if they can make it run more fluidly.

Lazlow
EA's Skate
Been playing the demo all day today.

Sensational, thats all I can say. They've nailed the nuances of skating almost perfectly. Instead of wacky goals, zero gravity, and million point combos, its all about smooth flowing lines and timing. The stack animations could be better and there are some physics quirks here and there, but on the whole this game is going to bury the Tony Hawk franchise.

AyatollaofRocknRolla
EA's Skate
I grabbed the Skate demo yesterday, and was pleasantly surprised. Having grown tired of the Tony Hawks franchise a while a go this game is really refreshing. It just feels right. There's a real sense of satisfaction in pulling off tricks. EA has really nailed it with the controls.

Creedy
Playstation Store Announcement Thread
I'm really liking Bladestorm and I think it's a day one purchase for me. It's basically an RTS but also kind of like Dynasty Warriors... People should check this game out.

consoul
Playstation Store Announcement Thread
Bladestorm is pretty underwhelming. However, the updated release of Tekken: DR (featuring online multiplayer, survival and practice modes) is available on the Japanese Store now. A patch is available for those of us who already have the original Japanese release.

clockw0rk
Bioshock - Strictly no Spoilers!
Holy crap, I only just realised that there's a difficulty meter for hacking. I just hack everything regardless...

I'm the hacking master, I hack everything I come across just cos I'm so goddamn good at it. I guarantee I'd find it simpler with a mouse, but like everything on console, once you get used to it, it isn't bad. I can swap tiles pretty damn quickly.

Stevo
Xbox 360 Elite - August 30th RRP $729.00AUD
MERRY ELITE DAY EVERYONE! Whoever goes out and buys one today, please post the prices at various stores so I know where to go tonight.

paranoiaagent005
Xbox 360 Elite - August 30th RRP $729.00AUD
The best thing ive found about the Elite is its quiet, my white xbox roared, but i can hardly even hear the Elite, even when its playing games like Bioshock and Gears of war.

Cerebral
Mario Kart Wii
The wheel looks lame, the graphics look average, and the courses are recycled as well? Is there anything other than the name to get excited about?

Späg
Mario Kart Wii
Not a fan of the Double Dash like graphics, I'd prefer a new graphical style, even cel-shaded would be more interesting. Doesn't look that exciting yet, but I have no doubt it will be a killer multiplayer title like usual.

hyperactive.com.au

hope not.
Cheers,
Ben McLean

Well Ben, we've talked about the "videogame blues" before. It's that feeling you get when suddenly the thrill of saving Hyrule, or the wonder of wielding Okami's celestial brush or even the prospect of finally breeding that elusive gold Chocobo and getting the Knights of the Round materia in FFVII, doesn't seem exciting to you anymore.

Perhaps, something else has turned up in your life that better occupies your time, maybe you're just too busy to fully immerse yourself in a game, or perhaps you just haven't found a game that really interests you in a long time. All of these things can contribute t the videogame blues.

The only remedy we can think of that can break such a spell is to sit down and play a game that really blows your mind. Get a friend to duct-tape you into a chair and hold your eyes open with clamps while forcing you to play some of the most brilliant recent releases including Bioshock, The Darkness, Virtua Fighter 5, God of War II, among quite a few others.

Although if Zelda: Twilight Princess and Okami didn't do it for you, then maybe you're beyond treatment...

TWO CENTS

After finishing issue 168, I thought I would chuck in my 2 cents on whether Hyper should revert to a score out of 10 or a percentage out of 100. Having a score out of a 100 is one of the reasons I believe Hyper is better than the other gaming magazines around. It allows the reviewer to distinguish between games on a more accurate scale. How can you tell which game is better out of two similar games which both score 8/10. Compared to Hyper's scoring method, out of a 100, these games might get 81 and 89 respectively, much easier to see which game is better and more worth your hard earned money. So Mr Editor Wilks, don't change how you score, it's the best way by far.

Anyway just thought I might mention how much I enjoy reading your features, like the ones on retro consoles, Star Wars videogames, crazy marketing policies, obscure games, comics and games, not to mention the hilarious Engrish one. These always bring back fond (and not so fond) memories. But kudos has to go to Dylan Burns, reading "The Passion of the Gamer" is always 5 minutes well spent.

Last issue I also managed to win Scarface on the Wii and on DVD, so that was pretty cool. Now I just gotta buy a Wii to play it on...

Cheers boys, hope ya have a good one,
Langer

Hmmmm, good argument Langer. But wait – a challenger approaches...

TWO MORE SCENTS

I just wanted to throw my two cents in to the "10/10 versus 100/100" debate. I've been a fan of Hyper since about issue 50 or so, and over the years I've thoroughly enjoyed your reviews, and they've helped me avoid plenty of gaming disasters, while showing me great games that I'd never even heard of.

I know a lot of people feel passionately about a score out of a hundred for each game, and it's helped me out over the years, but honestly, I've never really been that keen on scoring games out of a hundred.

Rating games out of ten is by far the most straightforward method of scoring games while still offering enough variation to allow for a proper ranking of its worth.

Some people may say that a 100/100 system may offer a greater range of scoring, but personally, I don't look back at previous review scores and compare them with more recent games every time I get a copy of Hyper and read the reviews. It really doesn't matter to me if Bioshock beats out some ancient game from ten years ago by a whole one percent.

Then there is the matter of not being able to use the full range of the 100/100 score. No magazine in their right mind would give a game 100% because that would imply that the game is absolutely perfect. I personally think that Bioshock deserves a ten out of ten, but only giving it a 97 of a hundred feels like a cop out. Like the magazine is restricted in how far it can go.

I think that Hyper would benefit from the change, so on a scale of one to ten – one being that Hyper shouldn't change their scoring system at all, and ten being that Hyper should totally change – I give this matter a ten out of ten!
Crumbcake.

P.S. The mag will still rock, no matter what the scoring system is like, I just think 10/10 makes more sense.

So, it looks like the Hyper readership are fairly split down the middle on the topic of changing our long-held traditional one-hundred percent scoring system. Stay tuned for more on this debate in future readers...

The Passion of the Gamer

Lost Love

By Dylan Burns

The path from game lover to writing about games is often a coveted one, and might be seen by some as paved with gold. This lovely gilded path of a writing career seems almost too good to be true: trips overseas, interviews with cool people, even the ability to have a self-indulgent monthly column. There exists, however, one writing gig that is anathema – the game guide. Much like a lady of the night turning tricks for her next meal, the lowly freelancer must unfortunately take on certain unpleasant jobs that act to taint the soul and sap the spirit. Game guide writing is one such job. Read on, for ye shall discover the vagaries of this debasing task...

Day 1 – The sun is shining brightly outside my study window, illuminating the gardens of Gameboffin Estate; the water fountain; the hedge maze; the two Rottweilers that guard my vast empire. It's on this fine day that I receive an email from the primal being known only as The Wilks. "Write me a game guide", he says. "Oh, and make it spiffy!"

My heart drops as I realise that once again I must meticulously pull apart a game and write many thousands of words so that the Inbred Society of Shit Gamers can work out how to find that last collectible or slay the final Boss. With this knowledge heavy in my heart, the sun's light dims a little to my eyes as I reluctantly pull the identified title from the shelf and get to work.

Day 2 – Despite my earlier cynicism, the guide is taking shape slowly. It helps that it's one of my favourite games of recent months, which makes both writing about it and replaying it quite a pleasure. There also exists that psychological boost that comes from the realisation that at the end of the day I am getting paid to play a game. It's almost a middle-finger salute to The Man. It is this thought that gets me through the long and gruelling day.

Day 3 – I get a visit from a friend. He's also a gamer, and I quite often bounce my ideas off of his bizarrely-shaped head in the belief that if he can understand half of what I argue then I may in fact be on to something (in which case I scribble it down and lock it away in my ideas vault). In any case, it's an interrupted day, because it's simply not possible to have a mate over and not fire up Guitar Hero II and wail away at Free Bird for a few hours. No work gets done.

Days 4 to 8 – I still love the game, but the act of pausing it every few seconds to write a note about a secret or collectible, as well as the constant need to reload sections and explore alternate paths, is starting to make this task a little mundane. It's on the eighth day that I make a landmark discovery. Not only are there other people on teh intarweb who have also played this game, but there exists a website – a holy Mecca – where like-minded boffins have actually written their own game guides. I sit there like a stunned mullet and take the rest of the day to digest this information. Do I or don't I make use of this untapped resource?

Day 9 – By my calculation, at the present rate of note-taking and game-replaying, it will take me exactly eighteen years, five weeks and two days to complete this game guide. It's simply too darn big and will likely bust the word limit right open. I swallow my pride and log onto www.sad_arse_gamers_who_write_gameguides.com for some much needed support. It's not really cheating – I've played the crap out of the game already. I'm simply comparing my own experiences with those of other gamers and, if need be, borrowing a cheat code or three.

Day 10 – I now officially hate this game. In the same way that married couples get bored of each others' bodies, I feel like my forced intimate knowledge of the game has completely rescinded any excitement that I feel for it. I now know every nook and crevice, every little secret, and unfortunately the whole experience has become emotionally vapid. This is a sad day indeed, for it marks the moment of lost love. I swallow my sadness and soldier on. Only another three thousand words to write...

Day 3. Boffin takes a break

Day Thirteen – I can no longer look at the game without a disgusted sneer forming in the corner of my mouth, and before me lays the unpleasant task of editing this poisonous document. With it finally finished, I attach it to an email and fire it of to The Wilks. "Here you go." I say. "I hope you're happy now!" He'll never know how much the process has affected me, nor will anybody who reads the guide. I rip from my journal any notes taken over the last two weeks, scrunch them up into a big ball and sit forlornly as they burn in the open fireplace. My work is done, my love lost.

Several weeks later – Slowly but surely my passion has returned. I am now at the point where I can actually look at the game (which cannot yet be named lest I descend into madness) and I've even allowed it to take its spot back in my collection, albeit with the name blocked out by removable black pen. The sun is once again bright and my life is returning to normal, although I still have a slight facial tick whenever I look in the game's direction. With a dedicated action plan and plenty of therapeutic gaming, I think that I may recover. Wait a minute, what's this? It's an email from The Wilks... "Hey Boffin, I need another game guide – that other one was great. Oh, and make sure this one is just as spiffy!"

Sir Gameboffin's Gamerscore: 27, 369 (thanks BioShock)

gameboffin@hotmail.com

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THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $30

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Singstar 90S (S/W Only)	Family
2	▲	Ratatouille	Adventure
3	▲	Rugby 2008	Sports
4	▼	AFL Premiership 2007	Sports
5	▲	Sing Star Pop Hits Bundle	Family
6	▼	V8 Supercars 3 Ptm	Racing
7	▲	Surfs Up	Adventure
8	▼	Sing Star Pop Hits (S/W Only)	Family
9	▲	Tiger Woods 2008	Sports
10	▼	Singstar 90S Bundle	Family

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $30

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Pokémon Diamond	RPG
2	▲	New Super Mario Bros	Adventure
3	◆	Pokémon Pearl	RPG
4	▼	Dr Kawashima's Brain Train	Family
5	▲	Diddy Kong Racing	Racing
6	▲	Ratatouille	Adventure
7	▲	More Brain Training	Family
8	▲	Horsez	Family
9	▲	Bratz Forever Diamonds	Adventure
10	▲	Pokémon Ranger	Adventure

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario Party 8	Family
2	▲	Boogie	Family
3	▲	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle	Action
4	▲	Super Monkey Ball	Adventure
5	▼	Zelda Twilight Princess	RPG
6	▲	Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition	Action
7	▲	Warioware Smooth Moves	Family
8	▲	Tiger Woods 2008	Sports
9	◆	Mario Strikers Charged	Sports
10	▲	Transformers	Action

TOP 10 Playstation 3 Games Over $60

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Ghost Recon 3 Advanced 2	Action
2	◆	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
3	▲	Rainbow Six Vegas	Action
4	▼	Fight Night Round 3	Action
5	▼	Formula One Champ Edition	Racing
6	▲	Virtua Tennis 3	Sports
7	▼	Transformers	Action
8	▲	Elder Scrolls IV Oblivion	Rpg
9	▲	Ridge Racer 7	Racing
10	▼	The Darkness	Action

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	The Sims 2: Bon Voyage	Strategy
2	◆	World Of Warcraft	RPG
3	▼	Bioshock	Action
4	▼	WoW: Burning Crusade	RPG
5	▲	Ratatouille	Adventure
6	▼	Battlefield 2142	Action
7	◆	The Sims 2: Seasons	Strategy
8	▼	C & C 3 Tiberium Wars	Strategy
9	▲	The Sims 2 Fashion Stuff	Strategy
10	▼	Age Of Empires III	Strategy

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Bioshock	Action
2	✪	Two Worlds	RPG
3	▲	Gears Of War	Action
4	◆	Blue Dragon	RPG
5	▲	Forza Motorsport 2	Racing
6	✪	Tiger Woods 2008	Sports
7	▼	Rainbow Six Vegas	Action
8	✪	Stuntman: Ignition	Adventure
9	▼	Madden NFL 2008	Sports
10	▼	Guitar Hero 2 Bundle	Family

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Bioshock	Xbox 360
2	✪	The Sims 2: Bon Voyage	PC/MAC
3	▼	Singstar 90S (Sw Only)	PlayStation 2
4	▲	Mario Party 8	Nintendo Wii
5	▲	Pokémon Diamond	Nintendo DS
6	▲	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo DS
7	✪	Two Worlds	Xbox 360
8	◆	Pokémon Pearl	Nintendo DS
9	▲	Ratatouille	PlayStation 2
10	▲	Boogie	Nintendo Wii

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 9th September 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Transformers	Adventure
2	▲	Ratatouille Psp	Adventure
3	▼	WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 07	Sports
4	▼	Ratchet & Clank Size Matters	Adventure
5	▲	Surfs Up	Adventure
6	◆	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
7	▼	Harry Potter Order/Phoenix	Adventure
8	▼	GTA: Liberty City Stories Ptm	Adventure
9	▲	Worms Open Warfare 2	Strategy
10	▼	Socom 2 Us Navy Seals 2	Action

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

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NEXT ISSUE: WTHIWWJP?

We head to to the Tokyo Games Show to see Ninja Gaiden 2, FF XIII and more!

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GAME

The next level

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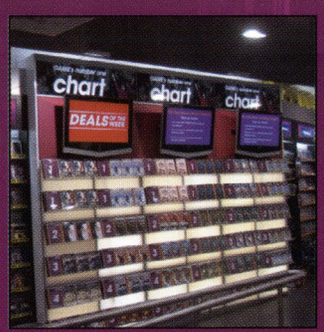
- logging onto the website **www.game.com.au** and look under Retail Careers
- go into anyone of our stores listed below and drop off your resume.



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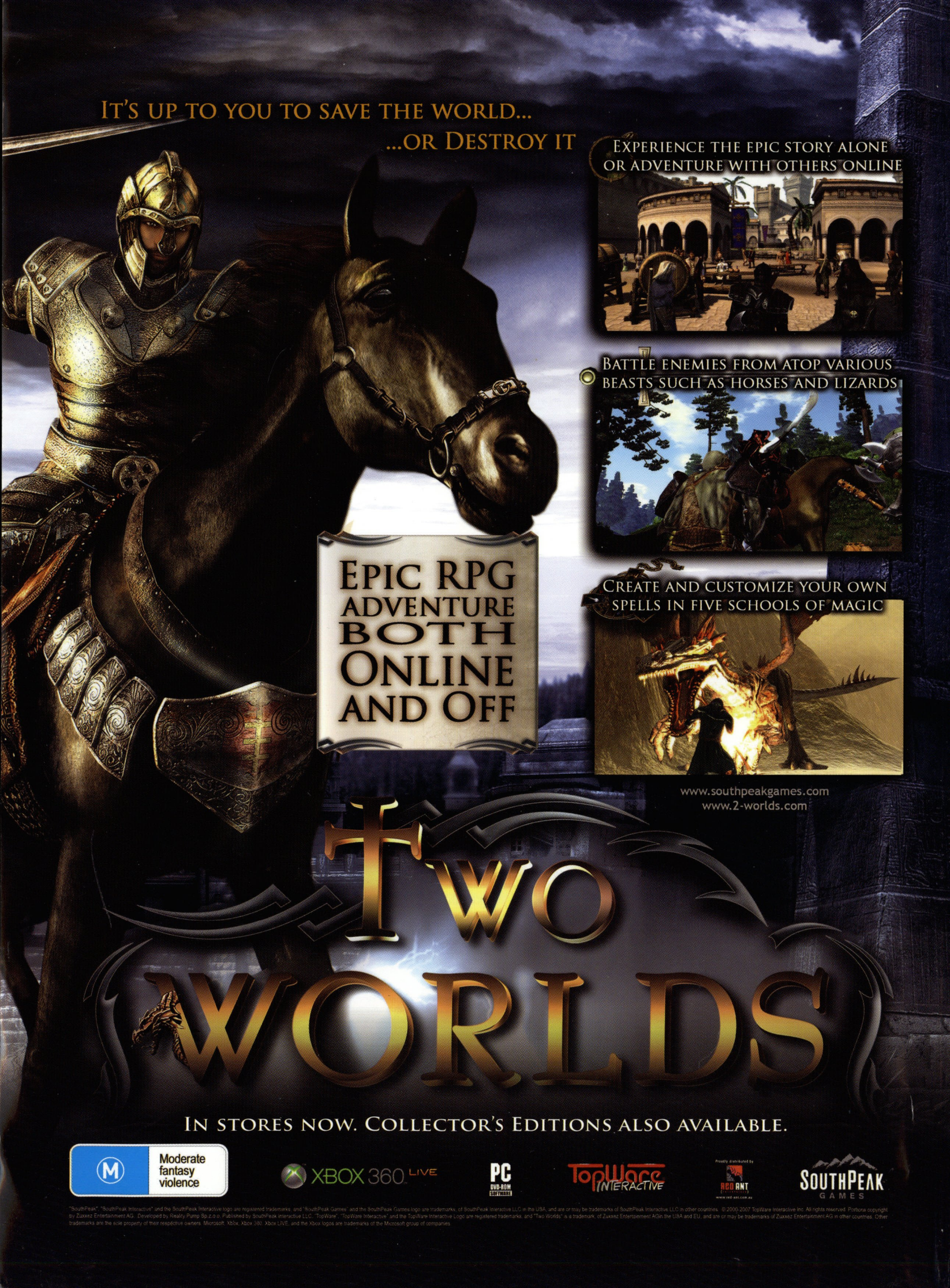

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